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PREFACE

The Current Affairs July-2020 eBook covers the current events that happened in the month of June. Current Affairs is a crucial component of any competitive exams including IAS/PCS, SSC, Banking and MBA.

Current Affairs play the bigger role in many competitive and government exams. It holds the power of making or breaking your chance of success. Therefore, the candidates should cover the Current Affairs thoroughly and smartly.

However, there are huge numbers of student who are often confused about how to prepare the current affairs section of the different competitive exams. To clear such doubts and confusion, Jagranjosh.com has come up with eBook concept.

We at jagranjosh.com work tirelessly to create this magazine and bring it to you with a great sense of gratitude every month. We always strive for excellence and therefore, our research team continuously endeavour to give you the best material.

The Current Affairs July-2020 eBook is divided into different section keeping in mind the need of various exams. The sections covered are International, National, Economy, Ecology and Environment, Science & Technology, Corporate, Sports, States News Makers and few others.

Every news item in each section is chosen on the basis of its importance in competitive exams. We also kept a close eye on some of the recent analytical stories which may have direct impact on your understanding of the issue.

Presentation of the given current affairs has been planned meticulously. It has been planned in such a way that it remains in the minds of readers for a longer duration. Wherever necessary each news item is presented along with a background and analysis so as to help candidates contemplate all the important current events at the time of exam in an effective way.

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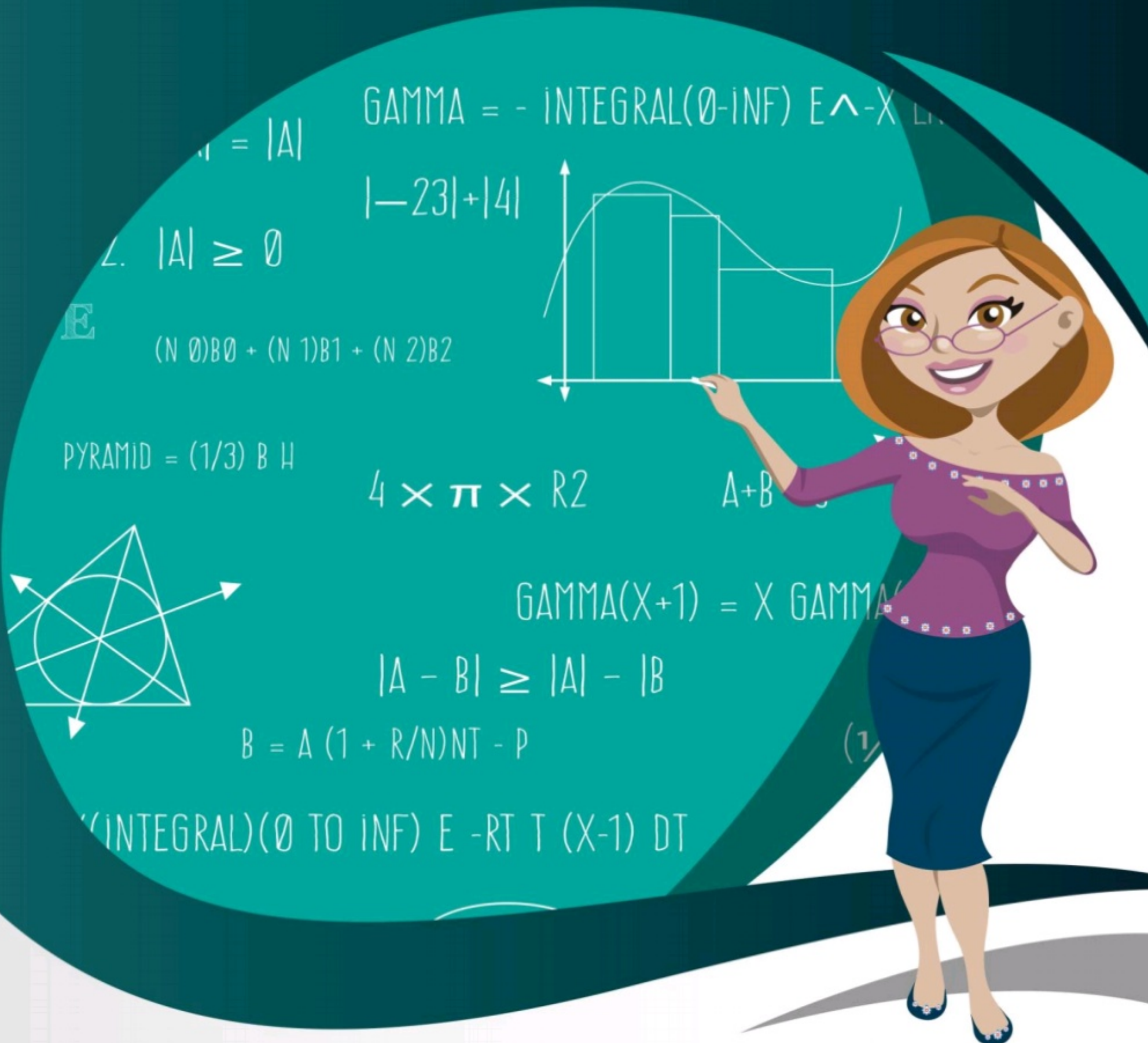
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National

India- China violent face-off in Galwan Valley: Indian, Chinese troops disengage, 20 Indian soldiers martyred



The Indian and Chinese troops finally disengaged on June 16, 2020 at the Galwan valley in Ladakh where they had clashed the earlier night. The Indian Army confirmed that 20 Indian soldiers were martyred in the violent face-off that took place on the night of June 15 and 16.

The number of martyred on the Indian side include 17 soldiers who had been critically injured during the clash and exposed to sub-zero temperatures in the high altitude terrain. Earlier in the day, the army had revealed that two soldiers and one Indian Army Officer had been killed in the clash. This takes the total number of casualties on Indian side to 20.

The Indian Army also revealed that there have been 43 casualties on the Chinese side including the dead and the critically injured soldiers.

What we know so far?

- A violent face-off reportedly took place between Indian and Chinese troops at Galwan Valley in Ladakh on the night of June 15 during de-escalation process.
- The clash was a result of an attempt by China to "unilaterally change" the status quo during de-escalation talks. India stated that the situation could have been avoided if the agreement at the higher level had been followed by the Chinese troops.
- The Indian External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Anurag Srivastava stated that the Chinese side had violated the consensus to respect the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Galwan area.
- Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held two review meetings in the national capital with the Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane over developments in Eastern Ladakh during the day.
- Major Generals of both India and China had also engaged in talks at Galwan Valley and other areas of Ladakh where the violent stand off took place in an attempt to defuse the tense situation.

The spokesperson for the UN Secretary General stated that they are concerned about the reports of violence and deaths at the Line of Actual Control and urged both sides to exercise maximum restraint. The UN spokesperson also took a positive note of the engagement of the two nations to deescalate the situation.

Significance

This unprecedented escalation at the border is the first between the two sides along the India- China border since 1975.

Background

India and China were conducting talks in Eastern Ladakh to resolve the tense border stand-off between the two sides over **Chinese military buildup**.

According to Army sources, there was disengagement between Indian and Chinese troops at more locations where there was a border stand-off since April.

The tense situation and build-up activity by both sides had somewhat toned down after June 6 talks between the military commanders of India and China. The meeting was followed by more round of talks.

The aggressive behaviour of the Chinese troops had also reportedly toned down and no incident of any violent face-off was reported between the troops after the disengagement talks had begun between the two armies.

All-party meeting on India-China border clash: No Chinese intrusion into Indian territory, clarifies PM Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired an all-party meeting today on the India-China border situation, which was attended by Presidents of main political parties including INC Chief Sonia Gandhi, TMC leader Mamata Banerjee, NCP chief Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena Chief and Maharashtra CM Uddhav Thackeray.

Other political leaders participating in the meeting include Telangana Chief Minister and TRS Chief K Chandrashekar Rao, Bihar Chief Minister and JDU Chief Nitish Kumar, Andhra Pradesh CM and YSR Congress Chief Jaganmohan Reddy, Akali Dal's Sukhbir Singh Badal and BJD's Pinaki Misra.

Union Ministers including Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Home Minister Amit Shah and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and BJP chief JP Nadda are also participating in the meeting.

Opposition Leaders' Statement

The INC Chief Sonia Gandhi questioned the government's handling of the intrusion by Chinese troops in Eastern Ladakh saying that it lost time and failed to use all avenues that resulted in the martyrdom of 20 Indian soldiers during the violent face-off between the Indian and Chinese troops at Galwan valley in Ladakh on June 15.

Gandhi also questioned whether the failure to immediately respond to the Chinese transgressions into the Indian territory was a result of intelligence failure. She further urged the centre for an assurance that status quo ante would be restored in Ladakh and that China will revert back to the original position on the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

TMC Chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on the other hand stated that her party was standing in strong solidarity with the centre against China. The TMC Chief unsparing in her words called for a boycott of Chinese firms across all sectors saying that China was not a democracy but a dictatorship.

Shiv Sena's Uddhav Thackeray stated that India wants peace but doesn't mean we are weak. He emphasised that China's nature is betrayal and India is 'Mazboot' not 'Majboor'. He further expressed solidarity with the Prime Minister in the China issue. Akali Dal's Sukhbir Singh Badal, BJD's Pinaki Misra and YSR Congress Party Chief Jaganmohan Reddy also expressed solidarity with the Prime Minister and the centre.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's statement

The Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stated during the all-party meeting on India-China border issue that there was no intelligence failure.

PM Modi at all-party meeting

The Prime Minister stated during the all-party meeting that India possesses the capability that no one can eye even one inch of our land. He reiterated that the Indian Armed forces have the capability to move into multiple sectors at one go.

PM Modi said that whether it is deployment, action or counter-action on land, air or sea, whatever our armed forces have to do to protect our country they will do.

Speaking on Chinese intrusion, the Prime Minister clarified that neither have they intruded into Indian territory nor have they taken over any post. He further emphasised that 20 Jawans martyred but those who dared Bharat Mata, they were taught a lesson.

PM Modi further stated that India's security forces are fully capable of protecting our borders. He stated that the government has given their armed forces full freedom for taking any appropriate action necessary. He reiterated that India wants peace and friendship, but upholding sovereignty is foremost.

Background

Prime Minister Narendra Modi convened an all-party meeting today to discuss the situation along the India-China border following the recent face-off at Galwan valley in Ladakh, in which 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives. The all-party meeting comes amid demands from several opposition leaders who are seeking details of the violent face-off between Indian and Chinese troops at Galwan.

The Presidents of 20 political parties have been invited to attend the meeting. Besides them, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and BJP President JP Nadda are also present along with the Prime Minister at the virtual meeting. The Defence Ministry reportedly personally called all party leaders and invited them for the meet on behalf of the Prime Minister.

Twenty Indian soldiers martyred during an alleged premeditated attack by the Chinese troops on the night of June 15. China also suffered casualties. The violent face-off came as India and China were holding de-escalation talks to resolve the tense stand-off along the border in Eastern Ladakh.

Criteria for Invite

The criteria to be invited for the all-party meeting included all recognised national parties, those with over 5 MPs in the Lok Sabha, leading parties from the northeast and parties with Union Cabinet Ministers.

PM Narendra Modi launches Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan to create jobs for migrants



Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 20 launched Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan in six states through video conferencing. This massive rural public works scheme aims at boosting the livelihood opportunities in Rural India for rural citizens and migrants returning to their home states.

The launch of the scheme was attended by Narendra Singh Tomar the Union Minister of Rural Development, Chief Minister of Bihar Nitish Kumar, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Madhya Pradesh CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Chief Minister of Rajasthan Ashok Gehlot.

The Abhiyaan was launched by PM Modi from Village Telihar of Khagaria District of Bihar. As per the government, around 39 crore people have received the financial assistance of Rs. 34,800 crore under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) amid COVID-19 lockdown.

The launch of Garib Kalyan Rojgar Yojana was shared live on PM Narendra Modi's Twitter account.

The objective of the scheme:

The campaign of 125 days will work in a mission mode. It will involve intensified and focused implementation of 25 different types of activities or works in 116 districts in six states. The scheme aims to provide employment to migrant workers as well as to create infrastructure in the rural regions of the country with a resource envelope of Rs. 50,000 crore.

States chosen for the campaign:

Across 6 states, a total of 116 districts with a total of 25,000 returning migrant workers have been chosen for this campaign. The states are namely, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha which includes 27

aspirational districts that have been selected by the government. These districts have been estimated to cover about 2/3 of migrant workers.

PM Modi at the Launch of Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the launch of the scheme mentioned that it is a historic day as the scheme for the welfare and for the livelihood for the poor has been started. The launched scheme is dedicated to the youths, to the workers, and to the women living in the villages. He added that the majority of these include those who have been returning to their villages amid the lockdown and want to develop their village through their efforts and skills.

PM Modi acknowledged that the country understands their feelings and requirements. The program that is starting today at Khagaria is a medium to meet your requirements as it will be running in 116 districts in 6 states. Prime Minister Modi in his speech credited the workers for giving him the idea of starting this scheme.

Prime Minister also held a conversation with workers and officials from Khagaria through video conferencing during the event. While beginning his address, he mentioned that every Bihari is proud of the valor shown by the personnel of 16 Bihar regiment in the violent face-off with Chinese troops in Ladakh.

Execution of the Garib Kalyan Rojgar Abhiyaan:

Garib Kalyaan Rojgar Abhiyaan will be a coordinated between 12 different departments and ministries namely, Panchayati Raj, Rural Development, Mines, Road Transport & Highways, Environment, Drinking Water & Sanitation, Railways, Environment, New & Renewable Energy, Petroleum & Natural Gas, Telecom & Agriculture, and the border roads.

LAC Border Clash between India & China: **What is LAC Line of Actual Control, Where is it located, What Happened**



India & China got engaged into a violent face off on 15th June night when the troops of both the armies fired at each other in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh. Both the nations suffered several casualties. Indian Army lost around 20 of its soldiers. Though Indian & Chinese armies got disengaged on 16th June, it is anticipated that the tensions between India and China may grow over the disagreements over the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. China has been continuously building up its military presence along the LAC by deploying its armed forces and artillery guns. The areas where China is growing its military presence are close to the territory of India from where China can reach Indian locations in a few hours. In this article, we have shared below what is LAC, where is it located on Map, why it is a disputed area between India & China and what is the difference between LOC and LAC.

Why the LAC is in News?

The locals of eastern Ladakh have reported the movement of hundreds of army vehicles along the LAC over the past few weeks. These vehicles are parked just 25 to 30 KM away from Indian side of the LAC. The troop movement of Chinese military comes at a time when both the countries are in a stand-off along the Line of Actual Control at Pangong Tso and the Galwan river valley. As of now, the Indian and Chinese armies are in talks to address the issue of LAC and sort the differences over the border area in eastern Ladakh.

Earlier on May 4-5, 2020, Indian Army and Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) were seen in a face-off near Pangong Tso, Ladakh, around 170 km from Leh. Additionally, the Chinese PLA troops completed the construction of a 3 km long road on the north bank of Pangong Tso lake from Finger 5 to Finger 8.

Why China's construction of road near Pangong Tso is a matter of concern?

The Chinese army has just winded up with the extension of road near Pangong Tso lake in just a period of two weeks in the similar manner when it extended the road over LAC to Tawang in October 1962 in just two weeks after capturing the border.

What is the status of Indian Army at the LAC?

The Darbuk-Shyok-Daulat Beg Oldi (DSDBO) road is strategically important for India. In order to contain the threat from Ladakh's Galwan valley, Indian troops have been positioned to block further movement of China's PLA toward India. However, there is no deployment of any Indian Tanks.

What is LAC & its full form?

The LAC stands for Line of Actual Control (LAC). It is the border demarcation line that separates the territories controlled by India & China.

Where is the LAC located?

The LAC is located in three difference sectors:

Eastern sector: Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim

Middle sector: Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh

Western sector: Ladakh

Why LAC is a disputed area between India & China?

For India, the LAC is 3,488 km long, however for China, it is just 2,000 km long. India has been building its territory over the LAC considering its 3488 km length. China has been demanding a freeze on such construction activities and infrastructural development by India. The major disagreements between India and China are over the LAC at the Eastern (Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim) & Western sectors (Ladakh). There is no clarification on the LAC boundary.

Agreements on LAC between India & China

China and India have signed four agreements on this boundary issue. These agreements were signed in September 1993, November 1996, April 2005 and October 2013. Indian & Chinese bilateral talks on border disputes is held on the basis of these four agreements. However, these agreements are considered to be flawed and are unable to resolve the boundary issue between the countries. Have a look at the details of these four agreements:

Year	Agreement	Flaw
September 1993	Maintenance of peace & tranquility along LAC No activities of China and India will overstep the LAC	These agreements are away from ground reality. There is no mention of the actual line location. There is no mention of line that separates deployment of India & Chinese troops
November 1996	Chalks out measures to build confidence in military field along the LAC	

	Both sides to limit their military forces within the agreed geographical zones	
April 2005	Political Parameters & Guiding Principles	First three stages are complete and fourth one is ongoing. The 4th stage involves demarcation of boundary on map and ground
October 2013	Border Defence Cooperation	-

Is there a map of the LAC?

Both the sides have shared & exchanged their maps of the Middle sector LAC - Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. However, there is no exchange of maps on western sector.

What is difference between the LAC & LOC?

The LAC is the Line of Actual Control between India & China and as of now there is no clarity over the line, there is no agreement over it by both countries and neither it appears on the map.

On the other hand, the Line of Control (LOC) is between India & Pakistan. The LOC is located on the map of both the countries and is backed by the Shimla Agreement.

Kisan Credit Cards campaign launched for 1.5 crore dairy farmers



The government has launched the **Kisan Credit Cards campaign** to benefit dairy farmers. Under the special drive, Kisan Credit Cards will be provided to 1.5 crore dairy farmers belonging to Milk Unions and Milk producing Companies within the next two months between June 1-July 31, 2020.

The Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying in association with the

Department of Financial Services have already circulated relevant circulars and KCC application format to all the State Milk Federation and Milk Unions to implement the same on a mission mode.

Approximately 1.7 crore farmers are associated with 230 Milk Unions in the country under the dairy cooperative movement.

Kisan Credit Cards campaign

- Under the first phase of the campaign, all farmers who are members of dairy cooperative societies and those associated with different Milk Unions and who do not have KCC will be covered.
- The farmers who already have Kisan Credit Cards based on their land ownership will be able to get their credit limit enhanced. However, interest subvention shall only be available to the extent of Rs 3 lakhs.
- Though the general limit for KCC credit without collateral remains Rs. 1.6 lakh, but the case of farmers whose milk is directly procured by Milk Unions will fall under tie-up arrangements between the producers and processing units without any intermediaries, and hence their credit limits without collateral can be up to Rs 3 lakh.
- The decision will ensure more credit availability for dairy farmers associated with Milk Unions as well as assuring repayment of loans to banks.

Significance

The Kisan Credit Cards campaign to provide KCC to 1.5 crore dairy farmers is a part of the central government's Atma Nirbhar Bharat package for Farmers. The Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman had announced on May 15, 2020 that over 2.5 crore new farmers will be covered under the KCC scheme. This shall provide additional liquidity worth Rs 5 lakh crore to the farmers, who are suffering from the recent downturn of the economy.

Background

Dairy is among the fastest-growing sectors of the Indian economy with a Compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of above 6 percent in the last 5 years.

Hence, the move of providing short term credit to dairy farmers for meeting their requirements for working capital and marketing will in turn boost their productivity tremendously.

Union Cabinet approves ordinance to create 'One India, One Agriculture Market'



The Union Cabinet on June 3, 2020 approved an ordinance that will pave the way for the creation of 'One India, One Agriculture Market'. The cabinet was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The ordinance is titled Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Ordinance, 2020. It aims to set up an ecosystem where farmers and traders both have the freedom of choice of sale and purchase of agricultural produce.

The Cabinet decision was announced by Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Narendra Singh Tomar.

Key Highlights

- The ordinance will remove restrictions on the sale of farm goods and enable their farmers to sell produce outside APMC telegraphic platforms without incurring taxes.
- Generally, there are restrictions on farmers in selling their produce outside the notified APMC market yards. The farmers can only sell their produce to the registered licensees of the state governments.
- There also exist barriers in the free-flow of agricultural produce between various states owing to the prevalence of various APMC legislation enacted by the state governments.
- The ordinance will remove the existing barriers by promoting barrier-free trade and commerce within the states outside the physical premises of the markets notified under the state Agricultural Produce Marketing legislations.
- The ordinance aims to provide farmers with additional trading opportunities outside the APMC market yards to help them get the remunerative prices due to additional competition. This will supplement the existing Minimum Support Price procurement system that is providing stable income to farmers.

Significance

The ordinance is a historic step that will work to unlock the vastly regulated agriculture markets in the nation. According to the Agriculture Ministry, it will certainly pave the way towards creating 'One India, One Agriculture Market'.

Benefits

The ordinance will help open more choices for the farmers, reduce marketing costs and help them in getting better prices. A separate dispute resolution mechanism will also be set up for the farmers.

Background

According to the Agriculture Ministry, India has around 14 crore farmers and 85 percent of them do not get remunerative prices for their produce, but the agricultural reform will enable them to get better prices.

The ordinance is a part of the Rs 20 lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat economic package which was announced earlier by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assist those impacted in different areas by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Govt allots Rs 4000 crore to states under 'Per Drop More Crop'

Department of Agriculture Cooperation and Farmer's Welfare has been implementing the 'Per Drop More Crop' component of Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY-PDMC).

For the year 2020-21, the annual allotment of Rs. 4000 crore has already been allocated and conveyed to the state governments by the centre under the 'Per Drop More Crop' component.



While making the announcement, the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare also informed about the creation of Micro Irrigation Fund Corpus of Rs. 5000 crore with NABARD for innovative and special projects. D

Allotment of the fund under 'Per Drop More Crop':

The PMKSY-PDMC focuses on the enhancement of water use efficiency at the farm level through Micro Irrigation Technologies, which is Drip and Sprinkler Irrigation Systems. This technique will help in water-saving as well as in reducing labour expenses, fertilizer use, and other input costs.

The Ministry of Finance and Farmers Welfare informed that as the allocation of Rs. 4000 crore has already been done, the state governments have identified the

beneficiaries to be covered under the programme. Fund release to some of the states has already been under process for 2020-21.

Micro-irrigation Fund Corpus with NABARD:

Micro Irrigation Fund Corpus of Rs. 5000 crore has been created with the National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). The objective of the allotted fund is to facilitate the states in resource mobilisation in order to expand the coverage of Micro Irrigation by taking up innovative and special projects.

It also aims at incentivising micro-irrigation beyond the provisions available under PMKSY-PDMS in order to encourage farmers to install micro-irrigation systems.

Micro Irrigation Funds have been released to the states of Tamil Nadu for Rs. 478.79 crore and Andhra Pradesh 616.14 crore, respectively through NABARD. The area that has been covered under these projects is 1.76 lakh ha. In Tamil Nadu and 1.021 lakh ha in Andhra Pradesh.

An area of 46.96 lakh ha has already been covered under Micro-Irrigation through PMKSY-PDMC, during the last five years (2015-2016 to 2019-2020).

Govt allows export curbs only on specific diagnostics kits, instruments



The central government on June 10 has decided to continue the export curbs only on the specific reagents, diagnostics kits, and instruments such as the silicon columns, swab sterile synthetic, and magnetic stand amid the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) released a notification stating that instruments, kits, reagents are freely

exportable subject to the submission of an undertaking by the exporter to the customs authorities at the time of the export.

The restriction on certain products was imposed because of the growing COVID-19 crisis. Among the listed products, reagents are the substances or mixtures that are used in the chemical analysis.

Products under restricted category:

If the product has been put under a restricted category, it will mean that an exporter will be required to obtain a license from DGFT for outbound shipments.

On April 4, 2020, the amended notification stated that only specified diagnostic kits/instruments/agents/apparatus has been restricted for exports whether as a part of any diagnostic kits/reagents or as an individual item.

Name of the products under restricted category:

The products that are still under the restricted category are:

- RNA extraction Kits
- VTM Kits
- 15mn falcon tube
- RT-PCR kits and reagents
- Probes (specific for COVID-19 testing)
- Reverse transcriptase enzymes

Background:

On April 4, 2020, DGFT had put restrictions on the exports of all reagents and diagnostics kits. The decision was taken by the authorities to deal with the COVID-19 crisis as these products were essential for testing the patients in India.

Bharatmala Project may get delayed by 4 years due to COVID-19: ICRA



Indian government's ambitious **Bharatmala Project** may get delayed by four years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as per ratings agency ICRA.

The first phase of Bharatmala was supposed to be completed by 2021-22 but now it may only be completed by 2025-26 due to delays caused by nationwide lockdown to contain coronavirus pandemic.

Key Highlights

- A total of 246 road projects with an aggregate length of about 10,100 km were awarded under the Phase-I of Bharatmala till February 2020 at a cost of Rs 2.38 lakh crore.
- The average cost of award stood at Rs 23.80 crore per km, which is 54 percent higher than the initial estimated cost of Rs 15.52 crore per km. The land acquisition cost for NHAI also increased at a CAGR of 27 percent from Rs 0.21 crore per hectare in FY2007 to around Rs 4 crore per hectare in FY2019.
- A total length of around 34,800 km roads are being considered under BMP Phase-I, which also includes 10,000 km of balance road works under NHDP. The estimated outlay for Phase-I of the project was Rs 5.35 lakh crore, spread over five years between 2017-2022, as per the initial plan.
- As per the revised funding plan that was drawn in September 2019, the dependence on market borrowings for the project increased substantially by 72 percent to Rs 3.59 lakh crore. On the other hand, the budgetary allocations and contribution from central road and infrastructure fund were reduced by 46 percent to Rs 1.83 lakh crore. Hence, the borrowings of NHAI are expected to increase significantly and peak by FY2023 or FY2024.

- Till March 31, 2020, around 21 percent of the Bharatmala project execution was complete. Post-March, the pace of execution for FY2021 is expected to remain low due to productivity loss and availability of limited labour due to coronavirus outbreak.
- The work is expected to later pick up pace by 10-15 percent in FY2022 before peaking in FY2024. The pending works are expected to be completed by FY2026.

COVID Impact on Bharatmala

The uncertainty caused by COVID-19 and the consequent impact on valuations could delay the asset monetisation plan of NHAI through toll-operate-transfer (TOT) auctions and launch of infrastructure investment trust (InvIT).

The plans are expected to take off by the end of FY 2021, depending largely on how quickly normalcy is restored post-COVID.

Background

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) had approved the Phase-I of Bharatmala Pariyojana along with other programmes on October 24, 2017.

As of March 2020, 47 percent or 16,219 km of the Bharatmala project was pending to be awarded. The project awards are expected to remain in the range of 3,000-3,200 km in FY2021 and increase thereafter. The awarding activity is expected to get completed by FY2023 only due to the current delay caused by coronavirus pandemic.

Bharatmala Pariyojana

Bharatmala Pariyojana is an ambitious Road and Highways project of the central government. It was approved launched by the government in October 2017.

Under Bharatmala, 83,677 km of highways will be built across the nation connecting states including Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Punjab, all Himalayan states, West Bengal, Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram.

Special focus would be laid on providing connectivity to rural areas including tribal and backward areas under the initiative.

TN, Gujarat, Maharashtra top in Food Safety Index for 2019-20



Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) on June 7 announced that Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Maharashtra have topped an index that measured and ranked states ensuring food safety in 2019-20.

As per the FSSAI statement, the three states have topped in the list of larger states on the index. While Goa came first followed by Meghalaya and Manipur in smaller states. Among the Union territories, Delhi, Chandigarh, and the Andaman Islands have secured the top ranks.

This was the second Index on food safety which was released by FSSAI on the occasion of World Food Safety Day along with the theme “Food Safety is Everyone’s Business”. The theme was dedicated to those in the supply chain who ensured the uninterrupted availability of safe food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FSSAI shared the ranking of the State Food Safety Index on its twitter account and mentioned the top states and UTs in the area of food safety.

Key Highlights:

- In a webinar organised by FSSAI, Health Minister Dr. Harsh Vardhan stated that food safety is a shared responsibility. The call to action for safe food is: Grow it safe, ensure its safe, keep it safe.
- The Health Minister also mentioned that as the government is lifting lockdown, we need to ensure that adequate precautions are taken in food service, restaurants, and delivery establishments. The food safety must also be emphasized through social media and other communication platforms.
- Preeti Sudan, Health Secretary stated that Food Safety Index is an excellent incentive in order to create competition among the states to improve food safety.

- FSSAI also released an e-handbook 'Eat Right during COVID-19' for the citizens on the occasion. The e-handbook highlights safe food practices, nutrition, and tips on health.
- The food regulator also took a series of steps to facilitate the uninterrupted supply of safe food during a pandemic.
- Rita Teatia, FSSAI Chairperson, and new CEO Arun Singhal also attended the webinar.

'Food Hygiene and Safety Guidelines for Food Businesses during COVID-19 Pandemic':

On the occasion, FSSAI released an updated detailed guidance note 'Food Hygiene and Safety Guidelines for Food Businesses during COVID-19 Pandemic'. The document specifies the sanitary requirements and hygiene, sector-specific requirements to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the food supply chain, the responsibility of management along with a section on the 'management of food establishments on the identification of COVID-19 positive cases'.

About Food Safety Index:

In December 2018, the United Nations General Assembly declared the first-ever World Food Safety Day. It was kicked off by Union Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan at Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) by recognising the efforts of food businesses, states, and individuals in promoting food safety.

In an effort to encourage states to work towards ensuring safe food for the citizens, the first State Food Safety Index (SFSI) was developed by FSSAI. This index measures the performance of states on various parameters of food safety.

The Food Safety Index is a dynamic qualitative and quantitative benchmarking model that provides an objective framework to evaluate food safety across all the states and UTs.

Parameters of food safety to rank the states:

The index ranks states on food safety on the basis of five parameters:

- Human Resources and Institutional data
- Compliance
- Food testing- Infrastructure and Surveillance
- Training and Capacity Building
- Consumer Empowerment

Petition filed in Delhi HC seeking to ensure 27 percent reservation for OBCs in medical, dental colleges

A petition was filed in the Delhi High Court on June 16, 2020 seeking directions to the central government to follow the reservation procedure of 27 percent reservation of seats for the OBC category in medical and dental colleges for the academic year 2020.

The petition claims that in the past two academic years, 2017- 18 and 2018-19, 5,530 seats that should have gone to students in OBC category under the reservation procedure, were allotted to students in the general category.

Objective

The petition has been filed to stop the alleged discrimination by the centre against the OBC students in dental and medical courses.

Key Highlights

- The petition alleges that recently it was known through news reports after the publishing of NEET results 2020 that the 27 percent reservation to OBCs was not being followed in the admissions to medical and dental college seats surrendered by the state government to the all India quota of the Union government.
- The plea claimed that the centre gave reservations to SC, ST, and economically weaker section category students alone and failed to extended similar benefits to the students belonging to the OBC category in the medical and dental courses.
- The petition called this a clear violation of Article 14 of the Constitution of India.
- The petition was filed by the Secretary of the National Union of Backward Classes through advocate A Rajarajan.

Background

Around 15 percent of the undergraduate seats including MBBS and BDS seats and 50 percent of the postgraduate seats including those of MD, MS and MDS courses from the state government's medical colleges are given to the centre under All India Quota, which fills them according to its procedure in every academic year.

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Economy

PM Narendra Modi launches auction of 41 Coal Mines, says India will turn crisis into opportunity



PM Narendra Modi launched the auction of **41 coal mines** for commercial mining through video conference on June 18, 2020. The launch is a part of the announcements that were made by the centre under Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan.

While launching the auction process of coal mines for sale of coal, the Prime Minister said that India will turn the COVID-19 crisis into an opportunity by becoming self-reliant and reduce its dependence on imports.

He said that the auction of coal mines is a major step to make India self-reliant in the energy sector. He stated that we are not just launching the auction for commercial coal-mining but bringing the coal sector out of decades of lockdown.

The Prime Minister highlighted that India despite having the world's fourth-largest coal-reserves and being the second-largest producer still does not export coal but is the world's second-largest coal-importer.

Objective

PM Modi announced that the government has set the target to gasify around 100 million tonnes of coal by 2030.

The centre has already identified four projects for the same and around Rs 20,000 crores will be invested in them.

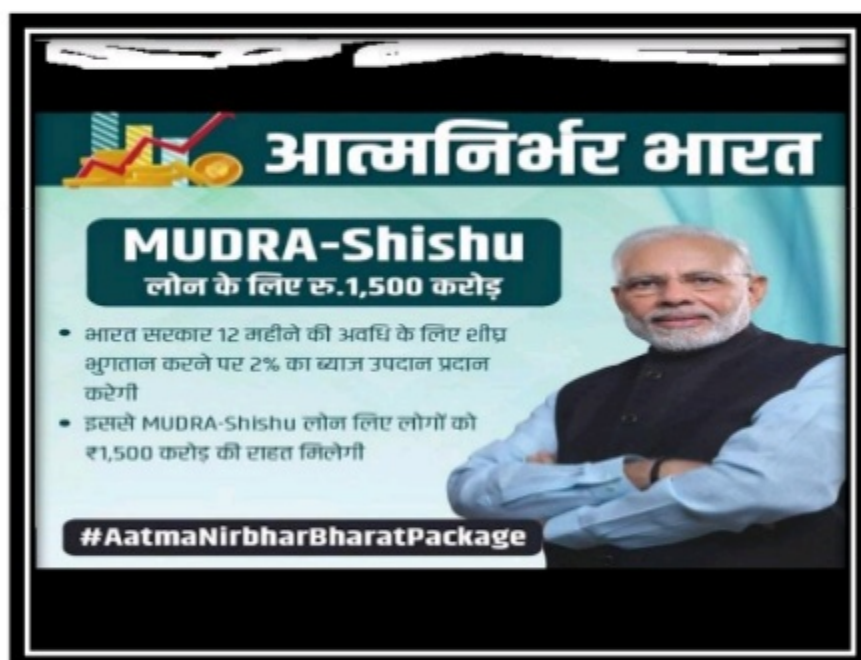
Key Highlights

- The Ministry of Coal, in association with FICCI, launched the auction process of 41 coal mines under the provisions of CM (SP) Act and MMDR Act to achieve self-reliance in the coal sector.
- The auction of the 41 coal mines for commercial mining is taking place at a time when business activity is normalizing rapidly in India. The consumption and demand is rapidly approaching the pre-COVID level.
- The auction process will pave the way for commercial mining, marking the beginning of the opening of the Indian coal sector.
- It aims to enable the country to achieve self-sufficiency in meeting its energy needs and boost industrial development.

Background

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that since decades, India's coal sector was entangled in a web of captive and non-captive. It faced the huge problem of transparency, as it was excluded from the competition. The current steps are, hence, being taken to strengthen the coal sector.

Mudra Shishu loan announced for small businesses



The centre has announced the launch of '**Mudra Shishu loan**' to benefit small businesses and cottage industries. Under the scheme, one lakh beneficiaries can avail an interest benefit of 2 percent for a year.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced the '**Mudra Shishu loan**' while announcing the second tranche of the centre's 20 lakh crore package to revive the Indian economy amid COVID-19 pandemic.

Sitharaman had announced that all small businesses impacted by coronavirus will get 2 percent interest subvention on loans up to Rs 50,000 secured under the Mudra Shishu Loan.

Key Highlights

- Under Mudra Shishu Loan, those who have availed loans up to Rs 50,000 will be given an interest subvention of 2% for the next 12 months after the moratorium period extended by RBI ends.
- The interest subvention will be provided to prompt payees for a period of 12 months.
- The scheme is expected to provide the benefit of Rs 1500 crore to about 3 crore people.
- Three crore people will get the benefit of Rs 1500 crore. The step is aimed to prevent the suffering of shopkeepers, especially small businesses in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic.

Significance

The move is aimed at helping small businesses, who won't be able to make regular payments for the loans they have taken for the next few months. The businesses are already on the verge of shut down due to a lack of revenue and demand.

Background

The Mudra Shishu loan was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman along with a slew of other measures aimed at reviving the Indian economy amid the crisis during the announcement of the Centre's 20 lakh crore Atmanirbhar Bharat economic package.

PM SVANIDHI Scheme launched by govt to provide affordable loans to street vendors



The central government launched PM SVANIDHI- Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor's Atmanirbhar Nidhi- scheme on June 1. This special micro-credit facility scheme will provide affordable loans to street vendors.

The scheme was launched by the Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry in pursuance of the announcement made by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in

May 2020. Through this scheme, the government will recognize the significant role of the street vendors at making goods and services available at the doorstep.

The launched scheme will benefit over 50 lakh vendors who have been vending on or before March 24, 2020, in urban areas. The duration of the scheme will be until March 2022.

Objective of PM SVANIDHI Scheme:

PM SVANIDHI scheme launched by the central government aims at enabling the street vendors to resume their livelihood which has been adversely affected due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown by the government.

Key Highlights:

- The vendors will be able to avail of a working capital loan of up to Rs. 10,000, which will be repayable in monthly installments in the tenure of one year.
- On early or timely repayment of the loan, an interest subsidy at the rate of 7% per annum will be credited to the beneficiary's bank account through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) on six -month basis.

- The Ministry also informed that if the beneficiaries repay the installments earlier or on time, they will develop the credible score that will make him eligible for the higher amount of term loan to Rs. 20,000 or so on.

Role of Urban Local Bodies in the implementation of the scheme:

Urban local bodies will be playing a pivotal role in the implementation of the scheme as the lending institutions under the scheme include, Regional Rural Banks, Scheduled Commercial Banks, Cooperative Banks, Small Finance Banks, Micro Finance Institutions, NBFCs, and Self-Help Groups.

It is the first time that NBFCs/MFIs/SHG Banks have been allowed in a scheme for urban poor. The change is because of their ground-level presence and proximity to the urban poor including the street vendors.

Also, for the fast implementation of the scheme for transparency, a digital platform with a mobile app and web portal has also been developed to administer the scheme with end to end solutions. This platform will also help in integrating the vendors in a formal financial system.

The scheme will also incentivise digital transactions by the street vendors through monthly cashback.

Power Minister launches real time market in electricity



The Union Power Minister, R K Singh formally launched the pan-India real-time market in electricity on June 3, 2020. This will allow consumers to buy power just one hour before the delivery.

The Real-time Market (RMT) will enable the consumers, including captive users and distribution companies (discoms) to buy power on exchanges just an hour before

the delivery. The launch of pan-India Real-Time Market in electricity took place through video conference.

The Union Power Minister informed that this step has placed the Indian Electricity market amongst a league of few electricity markets in the world that have a real-time market.

What is the Real-time market?

RK Singh during the launch mentioned that the real-time market is an organized market platform that will enable the buyers and sellers to meet their energy requirements closer to real-time of operations.

He further added that the introduction of the real-time market will bring the required flexibility to the market to provide real-time balance while ensuring optimal utilization of the available surplus capacity in the system.

Key highlights:

- The Real-time market went live at Power Exchange India Limited (PXIL) and Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) at 10.45 pm on May 31, 2020, for the delivery at 12.00 am on June 1, 2020.
- The real-time market will be able to make the power market dynamics as the auctions will be conducted every 30 minutes. There will be 48 sessions of auctions in a day.
- The proposed real-time market will provide an alternative mechanism for Discoms to access the larger markets at competitive prices.
- National Load Despatch Centre- POSOCO has been facilitating necessary automation in coordination with the power exchanges to ensure that there are faster transactions and settlements in the real-time framework.
- It will also lead to better portfolio management by the utilities with efficient power procurement scheduling, planning, imbalance handling, and despatch.

Government's target of renewable energy:

The Indian government's target of 175 GW Renewable Energy capacity by 2022 has been driving accelerated renewable penetration pan-India.

As per the power ministry's statement, the real-time market will help to mitigate challenges to the grid management due to the variable nature of renewable energy generation and therefore, it will help to integrate a higher quantum of renewable energy sources into the grid.

Finance Ministry directs departments to not initiate any new scheme, use resources prudently amid COVID-19 crisis



The Union Ministry of Finance has asked all Ministries and Departments to not initiate any new scheme in the current fiscal year, stating that there is a need to use resources prudently in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Department of Expenditure, which comes under the Finance Ministry, stated that there is an unprecedented demand of public financial resources amid COVID-19 pandemic and hence, the resources need to be used prudently in accordance with emerging and changing priorities.

The department stated that it has been receiving new proposals for in-principle approval from various ministries or departments. However, it directed that no new proposals for a scheme or sub-scheme should be initiated during this financial year from 2020-21 except the proposals announced under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package and Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package or any other special package or announcement.

The department announced that schemes that had already been approved for the current financial year will remain suspended till March 31, 2020. These include the schemes for which in-principle approval has been given by the department.

Which schemes will continue?

The funds announced for schemes under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package, the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan package and any other special package by the Finance Ministry will be allocated.

Regarding ongoing schemes, the department said that it has already given an interim extension till March 31, 2021, or till the date when the recommendations of the 15th Finance Commission will come into effect, whichever is earlier.

Further, the department stated that no funds will be released for schemes that are not in strict conformity to the instructions. No budgetary provisions will also be made available by re-appropriation to such schemes. It added saying that any exceptions to these guidelines would require the approval of the expenditure department.

Reserve Bank sets up digital payments infra fund of Rs. 500 crore



The Reserve Bank of India announced on June 5 that it has set up a Payment Infrastructure Development Fund (PIFD) of Rs. 500 Crore. The fund will improve and support the development of the digital payments ecosystem in the northeast and rural districts in India.

The initial contribution of Rs. 250 crore to the PIFD has been made by the central bank while the other half of the fund is expected to be contributed by all card-issuing banks and the network operators.

The fund set up by the central bank will be governed through an advisory council and it will be administered and managed by the Reserve Bank of India.

Objective of PIFD:

The objective of the Payment Infrastructure Development Fund (PIFD) as mentioned by the Reserve Bank of India has been to encourage acquirers to deploy Points of Sale (PoS) infrastructure in both the digital and physical modes in tier-3 to tier-6 centers and northeastern states.

RBI statement on PIFD:

Reserve Bank of India in a press release stated that over the years, the payments ecosystem in India has evolved with a wide range of options such as mobile banks, bank accounts, cards, etc.

To provide a boost to the digitisation of payment systems, it has become necessary to give impetus to acceptance infrastructure across the country and more importantly in underserved areas.

PIFD will also receive annual recurring contributions to cover the operational expenses from the card-issuing cards and bank networks, while RBI will also be making contributions from time to time to cover for yearly shortfalls.

Background:

Payment companies and ecosystem players had raised concerns earlier following the Finance Ministry's decision to waive off Merchant Discount rate on RuPay and UPI instrument the deployment of POS machines would take a hit.

They also claimed that without any monetary incentives, payment companies and banks will be reluctant to deploy their machines and acquire merchants in the rural zones as the cost of maintenance has been higher.

Merchant Discount Rate of MDR is the fee charged by acquiring banks from the merchants for providing payment services. The fee was earlier waived off for select National Payments Corporations of India operated instruments in January 2020.

India to set up Coal Exchange



India will soon be setting up a coal trading platform as it gears up to bring in commercial mining in the coal sector. Under the proposal, the entire coal produced in the country will be traded on a platform called '**Coal Exchange**'.

Coal Exchange will be an online coal trading platform where the pricing will be determined in a transparent manner on the

basis of demand and supply.

Significance

The setting up of India's first coal trading platform is significant as it paves the way for the entry of multiple buyers and sellers in the coal sector. The coal ministry is likely to start auctions for commercial coal mining on June 11.

Key Highlights

- The Coal Exchange will be set up after the government addresses all the concerns related to the coal sector.
- Till now, the government had a monopoly on coal mining which is why, despite having abundant coal, India still imported coal.
- The government has now decided to allow liberalised entries in the sector so India will soon have more sellers in the market besides Coal India.
- The Government has already allotted coal blocks to state PSUs for the sale of coal.
- Despite opening up the coal sector for market forces, Coal India Ltd is expected to remain a dominant player in the sector with its production target of one billion tonnes by 2024.
- The government is also expecting to have multiple buyers of coal along with multiple sellers.

- Hence, a platform like coal exchange similar to commodity exchange will facilitate better trading of coal.
- Coal Exchange is expected to be the only trading platform for organised sale of coal in India.

Background

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharam had announced reforms in the coal sector while revealing the fourth tranche of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat economic package. Under the reforms, she informed that the government plans to bring in commercial mining in coal sector on a revenue sharing basis.

The Finance Minister had announced that Government monopoly in the sector will be removed and liberalised entries will be allowed to enable more participation by people. She informed that India, despite having the third largest valuable deposit of coal, still imported coal and sometimes energy sectors suffer because of this. Hence, the government decided to bring regulation in the sector.

Global economy to plunge into deepest recession since World War II: World Bank Report

The Global Economy is **predicted to shrink by 5.2 percent** in 2020, which is the deepest plunge since the Second World War, according to the forecasts of the World Bank. The severe contraction in the global economy is a result of the massive shutdown measures evoked across the world to contain the coronavirus pandemic.



According to World Bank's June 2020 Global Economic Prospects, the largest fraction of economies will see a decline this year in their per capita output since 1870. Millions are expected to fall into extreme poverty this year.

The economic blow is expected to hit the hardest in countries worst-affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and those which heavily rely on global trade, tourism, commodity exports and external financing.

Key Highlights

- According to the World Bank report, economic activity among advanced economies is expected to shrink 7 percent in 2020 due to major disruption in domestic demand and supply, trade, and finance.
- The emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) are predicted to shrink by 2.5 percent in 2020, their first contraction as a group in almost. The per capita incomes are expected to decline by 3.6 percent.
- Though the magnitude of disruption will vary from region to region, all emerging market and developing economies have vulnerabilities that can be magnified by external shocks.
- The interruptions in schooling and primary healthcare access are also likely to have lasting impacts on human capital development.
- The U.S. economy is expected to contract by 6.1 percent this year, the Euro Area output is expected to shrink 9.1 percent, while Japan's economy is anticipated to shrink by 6.1 percent.

According to the World Bank, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to leave long-lasting scars and pose major global challenges. World Bank Group Vice President for Equitable Growth, Finance and Institutions, Ceyla Pazarbasiogl said that their first order of business is to address the global health and economic emergency. Beyond that, Pazarbasiogl said that the global community must unite to find ways to rebuild a robust recovery to prevent more people from falling into poverty and unemployment.

Baseline Forecast

The baseline forecast, which assumes that the pandemic will slow down enough to allow the lifting of domestic restrictions by mid-year in advanced economies and a bit later in EMDEs, global growth is predicted to bounceback to 4.2 percent in 2021. While the advanced economies are predicted to grow at 3.9 percent as per this forecast, the EMDEs will bounce back to grow by 4.6 percent.

The outlook is though uncertain, as it involves many downside risks such as the possibility prolonged pandemic, which can result in massive financial upheaval and disruption in global trade and supply chain. The downside outlook could lead the global economy to shrink by as much as 8 percent this year, followed by a sluggish recovery of just over 1 percent in 2021 with the output in EMDEs contracting by almost 5 percent in 2020.

Regional Outlook:

East Asia and Pacific Region: The region's growth is projected to fall to 0.5 percent in 2020, the lowest rate since 1967.

Europe and Central Asia Region: The regional economy is forecasted to fall by 4.7%, with recessions in nearly all countries.

Latin America and the Caribbean: The economic activity in the region is predicted to plunge by 7.2 percent in 2020.^{6.9}

Middle East and North Africa: The economic activity in the region is forecasted to contract by 4.2 percent this year as a result of the massive impact of the pandemic, especially on the oil market.

South Asia: The economic activity in the region is projected to fall by 2.7% in 2020 as pandemic containment measures hinder demand and services activity and uncertainty continues about the course of the private investment.

Sub-Saharan Africa: The regional economy is expected to fall by 2.8% in 2020, the deepest on record.

What measures can be adopted to reduce the impact of COVID-19 pandemic?

Health and Economic Policy Action: As per the World Bank, there is an urgent need for health and economic policy action, including global cooperation, to reduce the consequences, protect vulnerable populations and strengthen the capacity of nations to prevent and effectively deal with similar events in the future.

Strengthen Public Health Systems: It is also critically important for emerging markets and developing economies that are more vulnerable to strengthen their public health systems, address challenges posed by informality and limited safety

nets and enact reforms that facilitate strong and sustainable growth once the crisis passes.

Provision of Additional Stimulus: The emerging market and developing economies with available fiscal space and affordable financing conditions can consider additional stimulus to help revive economic growth. It should be accompanied by measures to help restore medium-term fiscal sustainability, strengthen fiscal frameworks, increase domestic revenue mobilization and spending efficiency, and raise fiscal and debt transparency.

Transparency: The transparency of all government financial commitments including debt-like instruments and investments is a significant step in creating an attractive investment climate and could make substantial progress after lifting the COVID lockdown.

India's foreign exchange reserves cross half trillion dollars for the first time



India's foreign exchange reserves has crossed the milestone \$500 billion mark for the first time ever in the country's history. The foreign exchange reserves had risen to \$8.2 billion in the week of June 5.

As per the data released by the central bank on June 12, the healthy surge in the foreign exchange was largely on the back of capital raising rounds by Kotak Mahindra and Reliance as the foreign currency asset held by RBI rose \$8.4 billion and stood at a record \$463 billion in the reporting week.

India's central bank has been shoring up its foreign reserves for over a year and has surpassed South Korea and Russia as the third biggest holder of forex reserves only behind Japan and China.

Key Highlights:

- Foreign currency assets that are expressed in US Dollars include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US currencies such as pound, euro, and yen held in the reserves.
- The earlier decision of rating company S&P's to not downgrade India's sovereign rating and outlook has also been expected to improve the foreign fund flow from global investors.
- RBI's reserve management policy's prime objective is the safety of reserves and liquidity.
- As per the latest RBI data, other components of Indian foreign reserve such as its reserve held in gold declined by \$329 million in the reporting week and stood at \$32.352 billion.
- Central Bank's and SDR reserve positions at IMF stood at \$4.2 billion and \$1.4 billion respectively.

The rise of foreign exchange reserves:

Saugata Bhattacharya, Chief Economist at Axis Bank mentioned that the inflows coming in on account of Foreign Direct Investment and Debt raising exercises by non-banking companies and domestic financial institutions would have largely contributed to the rise in inflow.

The chief economist added that the news is a significant psychological milestone in times like this.

K Harhar of First Rand Bank mentioned that something which differentiates our reserves from Japan and China is the sporadic FDI inflows and the contribution of inward remittances.

However, in recent months, the capital flows to some of the largest corporates indicate that not just sunrise sectors but the mature industries are also finding interest among global investors.

IMD's World Competitiveness Index ranks India at 43rd; Singapore tops the list



An annual World Competitiveness Index compiled by Institute for Management Development (IMD) has ranked India at the 43rd position. The International Business School mentioned on June 16 that the continued low ranking is due to the traditional weaknesses such as insufficient education investment and poor infrastructure.

Singapore has successfully retained the top position on the 63rd nation list. Denmark has moved up to the 2nd position, it was 8th last year. Switzerland has ranked 3rd while Netherland has retained its 4th place. Hing Kong has secured the 5th place, it was 2nd in 2019.

India has ranked 41st on the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking every year since 1989. It slipped to 45th in 2017 but improved to 44th in 2018 and then to 43rd in 2019. The ranking is produced by the business school based in Switzerland and Singapore.

Key Highlights:

- In the ranking, China has slipped from 14th to 20th place while the US has moved down to 10th place, it was 3rd in 2019.
- Among the BRICS Nations, India has ranked second after China followed by Russia at 50th rank, Brazil 56th and South Africa 59th.
- As per IMD, except, Singapore, Taiwan, the Philippines, and the Korean Republic, most of the Asian economies have seen a drop in their rankings this year.
- For Singapore which moved to the top rank last year, IMD states that its position is largely driven by the relative ease of setting up a business, cutting-edge technological infrastructure, and availability of skilled labour.

- IMD also mentioned that the impact of COVID-19 on the competitiveness ranking has also partially been captured by the executives' opinions regarding the effectiveness of the different health systems.
- Only Singapore and Thailand among the ASEAN countries included in the survey have shown positive performance in the healthcare infrastructure.

India at IMD World Competitiveness Ranking:

According to the IMD statement, even though India's position has remained unchanged in the 2020 list, the country has recorded improvements in areas such as current account balance, long-term employment growth, foreign currency reserves, high tech exports, overall productivity, public expenditure on education and political stability.

However, it added that the country has moved down in areas like real GDP growth, exchange rate stability, taxes, competition legislation.

The Head of Competitiveness Centre at IMD Business School, Arturo Bris mentioned that India continues to struggle on the list and the recent Moody's downgrade rating of the country reflects the uncertainties regarding the economy's future. He informs that in the ranking the emphasis is on the traditional weaknesses of India. To follow the path of China, the country must stress its intangible infrastructure.

Bris added that Moody's has threatened the country with the downgrade and that would put it in a terrible position to attract foreign capital. So, the government must focus to fix the short-term problems which will require to improve the credibility of the government itself. In a less global world with USA, Europe, and China looking inwards, currencies like rupees are going to suffer and display high volatilities.

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Environment & Ecology

Assam Oil Well Fire: Massive fire erupts at Assam's Baghjan oil field

A massive fire erupted at a **leaking natural-gas oil well** in Assam's Tinsukia district on June 8, 2020. The oil well, part of Baghjan oil fields, is owned by Oil India Limited (OIL). The oil well had reportedly been leaking gas since the last 14 days after it suffered damage following a blowout on May 27.

A team of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) was deployed in the area since the time of the gas leak. The Indian Air Force and the Army was also called in to assist in the firefighting operations.

The raging fire at the oil well could be seen from a distance of 30km and the smoke emerging from the fire poses a great risk to the local biodiversities. Around 6,000 people living in a 1.5-km radius of the natural gas producing well were evacuated and sheltered in relief camps.

How did it happen?

One of the oil wells at Baghjan Oil Fields in Tinsukia district of Assam suffered a blowout on May 27 and started leaking oil and gas. The oil field caught fire on June 9 though the reason for the fire is still to be ascertained. According to officials, it is expected to take at least 4 weeks for the authorities to control the fire.

What is a blowout?

A blowout is an uncontrolled release of crude oil or gas from a production well. It is generally caused by machinery failure.

What measures are being taken to douse the fire?

The Assam government deployed a team of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), district officials, police and paramilitary forces to bring the situation under control. The Indian Air Force and the Army was also called to assist in dousing and containing the spread of the fire.

A three-member team of disaster management experts also flew in from Singapore on June 8 to control the situation. As per the expert team, it may take about four weeks to cap the leaking well.

Damage Caused to Biodiversity

- The oil leakage since the past 14 days has been causing grave damage to the region's wetlands and biodiversity. The Baghjan oil well is right next to the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and only a kilometre away from Maguri-Motapung wetland.
- The images shared by locals on social media reveal depositing of gas condensate in the Maguri Beel wetland. They also show carcasses of endangered Gangetic dolphins and other aquatic life floating in the Dibru-Saikhowa National Park.
- The national park, spread across 340 sqkm, is a biosphere reserve and home to 36 mammal species including tiger, Gangetic dolphin, feral horses and 382 bird species. According to locals, several fishes, Gangetic river dolphins and birds have died due to the gas leak since May 27.
- The paddy fields, ponds and wetlands in the adjoining villages have also been contaminated by the leakage and the threat only grows with each passing day.
- Many houses near the Baghjan oil field have been destroyed in the fire. Nearly 1600 families were evacuated from the area. Oil India Limited has announced financial relief worth Rs 30,000 to each of the affected families.

Causalities

Two firefighters died in the massive fire at the Oil India gas well in Tinsukia district.

World Environment Day 2020: **Global CO₂ emissions hit record high in May amid COVID-19 pandemic**



The World Environment Day 2020 was observed across the globe on June 5, 2020 with an emphasis on the need to care for nature and humanity. World Environment Day is observed every year to raise global awareness on environmental issues. This year's theme of Environment Day is '**Biodiversity**'.

The World Environment Day 2020 theme is extremely important, especially with the recent events of major bushfires in Australia, Brazil and the United States. Taking care of biodiversity is both an urgent and existential concern, as each year, marine plants produce more than half of the earth's oxygen. A mature tree can absorb up to 22 kilos of CO₂, releasing oxygen in exchange.

According to the latest US government data released on June 4, the global carbon dioxide emissions hit a record high in May despite most economies being on a virtual standstill in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic. Though the lockdowns imposed across the world to contain coronavirus outbreak showed a positive impact on the biodiversity with the nature healing itself in many instances such as healing of the ozone layer above Antarctica, a key measure of global carbon dioxide emissions in the Earth's atmosphere hit a record in May 2020.

Rise in CO₂ emissions

The Carbon dioxide emissions that were recorded in a Hawaii Observatory-Mauna Loa Observatory reached 417 parts per million in May 2020, which is higher than record rise of CO₂ - 414.8 ppm in May 2019.

The announcement was made by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California San Diego.

Why has global lockdown failed to cause CO2 reductions?

As per scientists, there was a drop in worldwide emissions due to coronavirus pandemic. The global emissions stood at 26 percent in some of the countries during the peak of the lockdown. This, however, failed to have an impact on the large natural variations in carbon emissions caused by how plants and soils react to temperature, humidity and other factors.

How long does it take to see a reduction in CO2 emissions?

As per scientists, it would take carbon dioxide reductions of 20% to 30% for the next 6-12 months to slow the rate of increase in the CO2 measurements at Mauna Loa Observatory. A research published in the scientific journal Nature Climate Change had predicted last month that global emissions could fall by up to 7 percent this year.

According to Pieter Tans, Chief Scientist at National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, though the rate of increase of CO2 will decrease a bit, it will still be increasing.

Background

May is generally the month, which sees an annual peak in the global carbon dioxide emissions. However, this year the CO2 emissions are at levels that have not been experienced by the atmosphere in several million years. The CO2 concentrations are documented in a graph known as the Keeling Curve at Mauna Loa Observatory. The Keeling curve has been named after Charles Keeling, who began CO2 measurements there in 1958.

About World Environment Day

World Environment Day was first observed in 1974. Since then, it is celebrated every year on June 5 to engage governments and citizens to focus their efforts on a pressing environmental issue. The World Environment Day 2020 lays emphasis on the need to care for nature and humanity.

Nature and Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the foundation that supports all life on land and underwater. It impacts all aspects of human life including the provision of clean air and water, nutritious food, medicine sources, natural disease resistance and climate change mitigation. Hence, any change in this system can impact the entire life system and produce lasting negative consequences.

Biodiversity has been impacted across the world in recent years with several human actions including deforestation, intensified agriculture, massive industrialisation and encroachment on wildlife habitats and acceleration of climate change.

As per the United Nations, it would take 1.6 Earths to meet the demands that humans make of nature each year and if we continue to tread on the same path, it could lead to massive biodiversity loss, which will, in turn, lead to a collapse in food and health systems across the world.

Nitin Gadkari launches campaign on 'Prevention of Human and Animal Mortality on Highways'

The Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways and MSME, Nitin Gadkari launched the UNDP and MoRTH national awareness campaign on 'Prevention of Human and Animal Mortality on Highways' through a video conference on June 5, 2020.

At the launch, the union minister underlined the need to generate awareness and education for the masses that aims at reducing mortality on the roads, he also mentioned that the sustainability and ecology are most important for the human life.

The minister informed that India has witnessed nearly 5 lakh road accidents every year, out of which about 1.5 lakh lives are lost. He indicated that economy, ethics, and ecology are the three most important pillars of India.



Nitin Gadkari during the launch of the campaign:

After mentioning the accident rate in India which is nearly 5 lakh every year, Nitin Gadkari mentioned that he has been planning to bring down these figures by 20-25 percent by March 31, 2021.

He also informed that over 5000 black spots have been identified and their rectification process including permanent and temporary measures are being carried out on an urgent basis. SOPs regarding the rectification procedure of black spots for taking up long-term and short-term permanent measures have already been issued.

Road Safety Measures:

The Union Minister informed that various Road safety Measures have been highlighted to be focused upon the stretches of National Highways such as:

- Rectification of Black Spots
- Traffic Calming measures
- Crash barriers
- Repairing
- Rehabilitation and reconstruction dilapidated and narrow bridges
- Road Safety Audit
- Reduction of fatalities on vulnerable roads
- Safety during construction
- Highway Patrolling

Need to protect animal life on roads:

The Union Minister during the launch mentioned that his ministry has been fully aware and conscious about the need to protect animal life on the roads. He stated that ministry has requested all the agencies to follow up on the provisions of the manual titled 'Eco-friendly measures to mitigate impacts of linear infrastructure on wildlife'. The manual has been issued by Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun to make roads or any linear infrastructure and to take care of wildlife accordingly. Gadkari also requested the NGOs and social organisations to locate the black spots for animals on the roads and inform the ministries so that the necessary steps can be taken.

Nitin Gadkari informed that the ministry has been spending good amounts on creating an infrastructure that is conducive to animal use. He gave the example of Nagpur-Jabalpur Highway, where a via-duct has been constructed for Rs. 1300 crore in order to create the right of way for the tigers. Similar steps have also been undertaken in the forest area of Maharashtra, MP, Odisha, etc. It included conducting studies for the road engineering that will be favourable to animal movement, elevated corridors, constructing underpasses, etc.

He mentioned that MoRTH has always advocated the construction of underpasses/overpasses, elevated roads as ecological wildlife corridors in order to avoid fragmentation of wild animals habitats and will also abide by the compensatory afforestation schemes in lieu of tree required to be felled.

The new road projects to come up will adopt a green rating system of roads, that has already been approved by the IRC Council for Publication. Further guidelines will also be drafted for green roads that will be specific to India's bio geography.

Andhra Pradesh govt launches online waste management platform



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy on June 5, 2020, launched the 'Online waste exchange platform' of Andhra Pradesh Environment Management Corporation (APEMC). The digital platform was launched on the occasion of World Environment Day.

APEMC has been set up by the state government to resolve the existing insufficiency in managing the waste as well as to make the waste management market more organised.

APEMC will work close coordination with the Andhra Pradesh Pollution Control Board (APPCB). It will have a strong regulatory framework in order to handle the waste from cradle to the grave.

What is APEMC?

Andhra Pradesh Environment Management Corporation (APEMC) is the first online exchange waste management platform, that will be able to deliver 100 per cent safe disposal of toxic wastes. It will properly hold the scrutiny, tracking, and audit of the waste. APEMC will handle the waste from its generation until its disposal.

Objective:

As per the statement released by the Andhra Pradesh CMO's office, the APEMC has been set up as a government company to handle industrial waste.

APEMC will be working in close coordination with APPCB, which will make necessary provisions for industries/organisations to hand over the waste generated by their units and that cannot be treated in their premises, to APEMC for the management of waste, as per in accordance with environmental rules and regulations.

The launched 'online waste exchange platform' is India's first online waste exchange initiative that will ensure the disposing of industrial waste in a scientific and safe manner.

Features of APEMC-e platform:

- The platform will ensure that all the industrial waste generated in the state is disposed of safely.
- APEMC will streamline the collection of waste from the industries.
- APEMC will further sort and streamline the waste as hazardous and non-hazardous or e-waste as per the category.
- The waste will then be scientifically disposed of at waste disposal centres.

Background:

Andhra Pradesh has industries that fall under red and orange zone categories. They generate a significant amount of liquid waste, air pollutants, and hazardous and non-hazardous solid waste.

A large amount of these pollutants was going to the water bodies, which was alarming to the officials. With the help of this platform, industries will be able to approach APEMC, in case they do not have their own waste disposal system. APEMC will collect the waste and safely dispose of it.

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International

India elected to UN Security Council as non-permanent member



India was elected to the UN Security Council as a **non-permanent member** for a two-year term on June 17, 2020. India received overwhelming support from UN member states, winning **184 votes** out of the total 192 valid votes polled in the 193-member UN General Assembly.

Besides India, **Ireland, Mexico and Norway** also won the elections to the UN's most powerful body, while Canada lost. Overall, there were 192 UN member states present and voting.

A nation required 2/3 majority of the members present and voting to get elected to the UNSC, which totalled to 128 votes. India won with a sweeping majority with 184 votes polled in its favour. India's Permanent to the UN tweeted confirming India's major diplomatic victory.

Significance

India will now sit at the UN's most powerful body for two years starting from January 1, 2021. India will join other non-permanent members of the UNSC including the newly elected ones- Ireland, Mexico and Norway.

UNSC Elections: Key Highlights

- India was the only candidate for the non-permanent seat from the Asia-Pacific seat for the 2021-22 term. India's candidature for the seat was unanimously endorsed by the 55-member Asia Pacific grouping including Pakistan and China in 2019. The seat is currently held by Indonesia.

- Mexico was also the sole candidate from the Latin America and Caribbean seat. It won with 187 votes. The seat is currently held by Dominican Republic.
- Canada, which contested with Ireland and Norway for two seats in the Western European and other States category, lost out. While Norway won by 130 votes, Ireland won by 128 votes. The two seats are currently held by Belgium and Germany.
- Kenya defeated Djibouti to win the last African seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on June 18, 2020 after the UN General Assembly (UNGA) failed to choose between the two candidates during the first round. The seat is currently held by South Africa.

India at UNSC

India has been elected to the UNSC as a non-permanent member for the eighth time. India served seven terms earlier -1950-1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992 and 2011-2012. India's last term was exactly a decade ago.

UNSC Members

Permanent Members: The UN Security Council has five permanent veto-wielding members- US, UK, France, Russia and China.

Non Permanent Members: The UNSC has 10 non-permanent members and each year the General Assembly elects five non-permanent members for a two-year term.

Currently, the 10 non-permanent members of UNSC include Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Tunisia and Vietnam, Belgium, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa. The two-year term of Belgium, Dominican Republic, Germany, Indonesia and South Africa is ending this year.

UN General Assembly President

The UN General Assembly also conducted elections for President of the 75th session of the Assembly on June 17, 2020. Turkish diplomat **Volkan Bozkir** was

elected as President of the 75th session of the UN General Assembly. His candidature was endorsed from among the Western European and other States.

UNSC elections amid COVID

The UNSC elections were conducted under a special voting arrangement with several COVID-19 related restrictions in place. All 193 UN Member States were allotted different time slots to cast their votes keeping in mind social distancing protocol.

The UN diplomats arrived at the UN General Assembly wearing masks and left as soon as their vote was cast. India's time slot to cast the vote was 11:30 am-12noon. The current President of the UN General Assembly Tijjani Muhammad-Bande oversaw the entire voting procedure in the General Assembly Hall.

Background

The 10 non-permanent seats at the UN Security Council are distributed on a regional basis - five for African and Asian States, two for Western European and other States, two for the Latin American and Caribbean States and one for the Eastern European States.

According to India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador T S Tirumurti, India's presence in the Security Council will help bring to the world its ethos of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

India has been long demanding reforms in the UNSC, saying that it rightly deserves to be a permanent member of the council. India's bid is supported by some of the other permanent members of the UNSC.

India to serve as the President of UNSC in August 2021



India will be serving as president of the power 15 nation UN body for August 2021. India has recently been elected as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. The council presidency has been held by each of the members in turn for one month following the alphabetical order.

As per the office of the United Nations spokesperson, India will have a rotating presidency of the Council for August 2021. It will again preside over a council for a month in 2022.

For a two-year term beginning on January 1, 2021, India, Norway, Mexico, Ireland, and Kenya were elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on June 17, 2020.

Countries serving as UNSC President:

In January 2021, Tunisia will begin as a President of the United Nations Security Council. It will be followed by a month each for the rest of the year by the United Kingdom, the United States, Vietnam, China, Estonia, France, India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, and Niger.

India selected as a non-permanent member of UNSC:

In unique elections, diplomats and ambassadors from 192 member states cast their ballots in the General Assembly wearing masks and following the strict social distancing guidelines amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

India, which was the endorsed candidate from the Asia-Pacific States, won with 184 votes out of 192 ballots cast.

In 2021, the newly elected members of UNSC, that is India, Kenya, Ireland, Mexico and Norway will sit at the United Nations high table along with the five permanent members- France, Russia, China, US, UK- as well as the non-permanent

member- Tunisia, Niger, Estonia, Saint Vincent, and the Grenadines and Vietnam. The two-year terms of the Dominican Republic, Belgium, Germany, South Africa, and Indonesia will be ending in 2020.

This will be the eight-time that India will sit at the council's table. India was elected previously for the years 1950-51, 1967-68, 1972-73, 1977-78, 1984-85, 1991-92 and the most recent in 2011-12.

USA on Fire: Violent protests engulf United States against death of George Floyd, 40 cities impose curfew



Over 40 cities in the United States including Washington DC imposed curfews on May 31, 2020 in response to the violent protests that ripped across the nation against the death of African-American man George Floyd in police custody.

The US called in the National Guard to respond to the protests. Around 5,000 National Guard members have been activated

in 15 states and another 2000 have been prepared to be activated if needed. This was informed by Chief of the National Guard Bureau Gen. Joseph Lengyel. US President Donald Trump also tweeted about activating the National Guard in Minneapolis.

US denies racism claims

The US National security adviser Robert O'Brien denied claims of systemic racism being present across the American police forces. He said that 99.9 percent of America's law enforcement officers are great Americans and many of them are African American, Hispanic and Asian.

Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden said that the United States was "in pain". He said that we must not allow this pain to destroy us.

US to designate Antifa as terrorist organization

The United States has decided to designate the far-left anti-fascist movement Antifa as a terrorist organization. US President Donald Trump made the announcement on May 31 on his twitter account.

Why are the protests happening in the US?

Protests have sparked across the United States in the demonstration against police violence and racism that allegedly led to the death of George Floyd. The 46-year-old African American man died while being in police custody in the city of Minneapolis.

Who was George Floyd? How did he die?

George Floyd was an unarmed black man who died on May 25, 2020 after a white police officer in Minneapolis knelt on his neck for more than eight minutes as he told him "I can't breathe". George Floyd was handcuffed and pinned to the ground at that time. A video of the tragic incident was captured by onlookers.

The video soon went viral on social media, triggering widespread outrage among people across the United States against racial discrimination. It became the driving force of the protests.

George Floyd Death Protests

The people of Denver in Colorado, US protested against the murder of George Floyd by laying down on the ground under the scorching sun with their hands folded behind their back for 9 minutes and screaming like George Floyd: "I can't breathe"

The White House went dark as protests outside intensified on May 31 with many protestors throwing rocks. US President Trump was reportedly rushed to the White House bunker. The bunker has been designed for use in case emergencies such as terrorist attacks.

Background

The protests, which began in Minneapolis soon spread to other US cities including Memphis, Los Angeles, New York and Atlanta. In Washington DC, protestors gathered outside the White House, prompting the Secret Service to temporarily lock down the building and rush the President to White House bunker, meant for emergencies.

US President Donald Trump invites PM Narendra Modi to G7 meet, discusses India-China standoff



US President Donald Trump invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the next G7 meeting during their telephonic conversation on June 2, 2020.

PM Modi tweeted after his talk with Trump saying that he had a warm and productive conversation with my friend President. He said that they discussed Trump's plans for the US Presidency of G-7, the COVID-19 pandemic and many other issue.

This announcement comes a day after the US President discussed plans of expanding the Group of 7 with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin over the phone

to include more diverse countries such as India and Russia to better represent the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 46th G7 summit, which was earlier supposed to be held at Camp David in the United States from June 10-12, has been postponed by US President Trump to September 2020.

Trump-Modi Talks

- The US President and Indian Prime Minister discussed the G7 expansion and other issues during their 40-minute call including India-China border standoff and reforms of the World Health Organisation.
- PM Modi commended President Trump for his far-sighted approach as far as G7 expansion was concerned, acknowledging that an expanded forum would be in keeping with the emerging realities of the post-COVID world. The Indian Prime Minister said India would be happy to work with the US and other countries to ensure the success of the proposed Summit.
- The two leaders reportedly discussed the India-China border stand-off and shared their perceptions about the standoff, which was triggered last month after China's People's Liberation Army activated the Line of Actual Control at Naku La area in north Sikkim and at three points in Galwan and one point at Pangong Tso in Ladakh sector.
- The leaders also discussed their view on the reforms at the World Health Organisation. Both leaders have been supporting the push for reforms in the WHO but have chosen different approaches to relay the same.
- While PM Modi has decided to push hard on reforms while staying as a part of the WHO, US President pushed for reforms by terminating the US's relationship with the world health body.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi also expressed concern regarding the ongoing protests in the US over the death of African-American George Floyd in police custody. He also conveyed his best wishes for an early resolution of the situation

Significance

The telephonic conversation between US President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi marks a new high in India-US relations. This is one of the rare instances when leaders of the two nations have personally taken the initiative to discuss national-level disturbances occurring in each other's nations.

Trump plans to expand G7 group

US President Donald Trump during his latest phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin had discussed plans to expand the Group of 7 to again include Russia and other nations such as India, South Korea and Australia. India is a member of G-20, which is a larger version of the body.

The Group of Seven presently comprises the world's most advanced economies including the United States, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Canada and Italy. The US President described the G7 as outdated and advocated it to be rechristened into G10 or G11.

Why Trump's plan to expand G7 is controversial?

Trump's plan to expand the G7 to include Russia, India, Australia and South Korea is controversial as, which was earlier a part of the group, was removed from it after it annexed Crimea in Ukraine in 2014.

Russia had been formally inducted as a member in the group in 1998, with which G7 became G8. However, Russia's act of moving its troops into eastern Ukraine and conquering Crimea in 2014 drew heavy criticism from the other G8 nations, which then decided to suspend Russia from the group.

Background

PM Narendra Modi had participated in the 45th G7 Summit as well, which had taken place in August 2019 at Biarritz, France. India had been specially invited as a "Biarritz partner country" for the 45th G7 summit by French President Emmanuel Macron along with other nations including Australia, Chile, South Africa, Rwanda, Senegal, Egypt and Burkina Faso.

India had attended the G7 summit in 2019 after a gap of almost 10 years. The last time India attended the summit was in 2005, when PM Manmohan Singh had represented India at the summit on the invitation of the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

India-Australia Virtual Meet: India, Australia sign 7 agreements on public reforms, defence, critical technology



Prime Minister Narendra Modi held the first-ever 'India-Australia Virtual Summit' with Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison on June 4, 2020. The Australian PM was scheduled to visit India this year but the visit could not take place. It was then agreed to hold the virtual summit.

This is the first-ever 'Bilateral Virtual Summit' between India and Australia. This signifies the strengthening of India's ties with Australia and its upward trajectory.

PM Modi in his opening note expressed his heartfelt condolences to all the people and families affected by COVID-19 in Australia on behalf of India. He said that the global epidemic has affected every type of system in the world. He noted that their virtual summit is itself an example of it.

List of Documents signed/ announced

Following documents were announced/signed during India-Australia Virtual Summit:

Announced

1. Joint Statement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Republic of India and Australia
2. Joint Declaration on a Shared Vision for Maritime Cooperation in the Indo- Pacific.

Signed

1. Framework Arrangement on Cyber and Cyber-Enabled Critical Technology Cooperation.
2. MOU on cooperation in the field of mining and processing of Critical and Strategic minerals.
3. Arrangement concerning Mutual Logistics Support (MLSA).
4. Implementing Arrangement concerning cooperation in Defence Science and Technology to the MoU on Defence Cooperation.
5. Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in the field of Public Administration and Governance Reforms.
6. Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training.
7. Memorandum of Understanding on Water Resources Management.

PM Modi address at India-Australia Virtual Summit

- While expressing a little disappointment in not getting the opportunity to warmly welcome the Australian PM to India, PM Modi urged him and his family to visit India as soon as the situation improves.
- Speaking on India-Australia relations, PM Modi stated that the two nations share deep relations and the depth comes from their shared values, interests, geography and objectives.
- PM Modi reiterated that this is the perfect opportunity to further strengthen relations between India and Australia.
- Speaking on strengthening their friendship, PM Modi stated that though there are infinite possibilities to make their friendship stronger, they

also bring challenges such as how to translate this potential into reality, so that links between the citizens, businesses, academics, researchers of both countries become stronger.

- PM Modi reiterated that the relations between India and Australia should be a factor of stability for the entire region and the world and all aspects including how we work together for global good, will need to be considered.
- On sharing Democratic values, PM Modi said that both India and Australia have to live up to the nations have from each other and the citizens have from us by upholding the values of global welfare such as democracy, rule of law, freedom, mutual respect, respect for international institutions and transparency.
- PM Modi further reiterated that India is committed to expanding its relations with Australia on a wider and faster pace. This is not only important for the two nations but also for the entire Indo-Pacific region and the world.
- He observed how various institutional dialogues are providing more substance to India-Australia relations. There are also continuous high-level exchanges between the two countries.
- PM Modi noted how trade and investment are also increasing but he stated that he is not satisfied with the pace of the expansion.
- The Indian Prime Minister stated that when a leader like Scott Morrison is leading Australia, then the criteria for the pace of development in the relations between India and Australia should also be ambitious.
- The two leaders announced that they will be upgrading India- Australia bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. PM Modi said the role of their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership will be more important in this period of the global epidemic.
- PM Modi stated that the world needs a coordinated and collaborative approach to overcome the economic and social side effects of this epidemic and India has decided to view this crisis as an opportunity.
- In India, a process of comprehensive reforms has been initiated in almost all areas and they will soon see results at the ground level.

- PM Modi further thanked the Australian PM for taking care of the Indian community in Australia, and especially the Indian students during this difficult time.

Background

The Indian and Australian Prime Ministers had earlier had a telephonic conversation on April 6, 2020 to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges posed by the crisis and the support required for citizens stranded in each other's country.

India-Australia Relations

- India and Australia share extremely warm and friendly relations, which have only been growing steadily with years. The visit of former Australian PM Tony Abbott to India in September 2014 and PM Modi's visit to Australia in November 2014 further strengthened the partnership between the two countries.
- The two countries had signed a framework for security cooperation in November 2014 that laid the foundation for intensified foreign, defence and security policy exchanges between the two countries.
- The economic engagement and trade has also been growing between the two nations. In 2018-2019, the trade between India and Australia stood at around USD 21 billion. The nations are further looking to expand investments and trade with each other.
- The two nations also have a shared approach to a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Australia supports India's global initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative.

Australia also supports India's demand for permanent membership in an expanded United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

- Australia has also supported India's membership to Australia Group and Wassenaar Arrangement. It also supports India's membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).

World Economic Forum to host 'twin summit' in January 2021



The World Economic Forum will be hosting a unique **"Twin Summit"** in January 2021. The world body made the announcement on June 3, 2020.

The unique 'twin summit' will be held in Davos, Switzerland with the theme **"The Great Reset"**. The 51st WEF summit is expected to see wider participation with virtual link-ups in 400 cities across the world during the main event.

The World Economic Forum said in a statement that the COVID-19 crisis and the economic, social and political disruptions caused by the pandemic have exposed inadequacies in the health care system and the financial and energy systems across the world.

WEF Chief Executive Klaus Schwab stated that the COVID-19 crisis has shown us that the old systems are not fit for the 21st century any more. The WEF Chief Executive made the statement while hosting a virtual meeting at the WEF headquarters in Geneva.

The WEF Chief Executive stated that the COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the world's transition, paving way for the fourth industrial revolution. He said that countries have to make sure new technologies remain human-centered and serve society as a whole, giving everyone fair access.

Schwab further stated that he intends to host a twin summit with some delegates joining in Davos and others connecting virtually from around 400 cities across the world.

The announcement comes at a time when most major summits and conferences have been cancelled in the wake of the global coronavirus outbreak.

Background

The 50th WEF summit was held in January 2020 with the theme 'Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World'. The theme focused on the idea that managers of the companies have a duty towards customers and the whole economy, besides the company's shareholders. The four-day WEF event, which began on January 21, 2020 saw participation of over 50 heads of State from 117 participating countries including US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

WHO restarts HCQ trial to find COVID-19 treatment



The World Health Organization (WHO) has decided to restart Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) part of its Solidarity Trial. This trial by WHO is a global effort to find the treatment for COVID-19.

WHO had earlier suspended the HCQ segment of its trial based on the study published by The Lancet that questioned the effectiveness of HCQ on hospitalized COVID-19 patients. The study had mentioned that it had failed to find any benefit of HCQ or CQ (an anti-malarial drug) in the treatment.

WHO's Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on June 3 announced that on the basis of the available mortality data, the members of the committee have recommended that there are no definite reasons to modify the trial protocol.

WHO's Director-General also made the announcement through his official twitter handle informing that there will be no modification in the Solidarity Trial which aims at finding COVID-19 treatment.

WHO on resuming the HCQ trial:

As per WHO's Director-General, the members of the committee have recommended that there must not be any modifications in the Solidarity Trail. He further added that the Executive Group will communicate with the principal investigators in the trial about resuming the Hydroxychloroquine arm of the trial.

The Chief Scientist at WHO, Soumya Swaminathan also mentioned the data safety monitoring board has reviewed the mortality data in Solidarity and that they did not have any concerns related to the morality between HCQ and Standard of Care. Hence, the WHO has decided to resume the trial.

India on the suspension of HCQ arm from the trial:

After WHO had suspended the HCQ segment, India had maintained its faith in the continued prophylactic use of Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) for COVID-19 and stated that there has been enough experience and data from case-control and observational studies to warrant its use.

India had also questioned the integrity of the study and remained consistent in its directions for the use of HCQ for COVID-19 treatment and the combination of drug and antibiotic azithromycin for treating the virus.

Doubts on The Lancet Study:

The study over which The Lancet issued an 'expression of concern' had used data from the hospitals that were obtained by Chicago based company Surgisphere, which is founded by Dr. Sapan Desai who was also one the co-author of the study.

The study mentioned that it had failed to find any benefit of HCQ or CQ and that these were associated with 'decreased in-hospital survival and an increased frequency of ventricular arrhythmias' when used for treating COVID-19.

Questions were raised about the integrity of the data and its privacy and security aspects. For example, there were questions about the database that showed more cases in Australia than were officially there at the time the study was done. Surgisphere had responded by reassigning the hospital to Asia.

Lancet's response on its criticism:

The company mentioned that it had earlier stated that the results of our analyses should not be over-interpreted to those who have yet to develop or those who have not been hospitalized because of the disease.

The Lancet in a statement also mentioned that scientific questions were raised about the data in the paper that was authored by Desai, cardiologist Mandeep Mehra

and Zurich cardiologist Frank Ruschitzka. The company informed that an independent audit has been commissioned.

The Lancet was not the only journal that had second thoughts about the quality of data that was supplied by the Surgisphere. Similar concerns were also published by The New England Journal of Medicine about a study that it had published on the effect of some cardiovascular drugs on Coronavirus. Desai and Mehra were part of that study as well.

India becomes founding member of global alliance on Artificial Intelligence



India joined international and multi-stakeholder initiative Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) as its founding member on June 15, 2020. By becoming the founding member of the initiative, India has joined the leading nations of the world including the UK, EU, US, Australia among others.

The global initiative aims to guide responsible development and use of Artificial Intelligence, grounded in human rights, diversity, inclusion, innovation, and economic growth. It will also provide support to the cutting-edge research and applied activities on AI-related priorities.

The multi-stakeholder initiative will also work toward evolving better understanding of the opportunities and challenges around Artificial Intelligence (AI) while using the diversity and experience of the participating countries.

Union Minister for Electronics and IT, Ravi Shankar Prasad made an announcement through a tweet and mentioned that India has joined GPAI as a founding member.

Indian Government on becoming the founding member of GPAI:

As per the statement released by the Union Government of India, by joining GPAI as a founding member, India will be able to actively participate in the global

development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), leveraging its own experience around the use of digital technologies for inclusive growth.

The statement added that the collaboration with International Organizations and partners, GPAI will bring together experts from the civil society, industry, academia, and government to collaborate to promote the responsible evolution of Artificial Intelligence (AI). It will also evolve methodologies to show how AI can be leveraged to better respond to the current global crisis around COVID-19.

Ravi Shankar Prasad had also launched the National AI Portal in order to bring together the best ideas and resources on AI that can be leveraged across various industries and sectors.

Other countries joining the partnership:

The other nations that have joined the partnership are France, Canada, Germany, Japan, Italy, Mexico, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, and Singapore.

Global Partnership for Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) will be supported by a Secretariat. It will be hosted by OECD- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in Paris, as well as by the two Centres of Expertise- one each in Paris and Montreal.

India pledges to donate USD 15 million to International Vaccine Alliance GAVI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged to donate USD 15 million to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (GAVI). He made the announcement during the Global Vaccine Summit hosted by the United Kingdom (UK) on June 4, 2020.



The virtual summit was opened by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson who urged the nations around the world to pledge for vaccination funding in order to save millions of lives as well as to protect the world from future outbreaks.

PM Modi in his address supported GAVI mentioning that India's huge demand will bring down the global price of vaccines. He was among 35 heads of states and government participants, including United States President Donald Trump to virtually join the conference.

Global Vaccine Summit: Key Highlights

- The leaders of around 35 heads of states virtually joined the conference that aimed at raising USD 7.4 million to immunise further 300 million children in the poorest countries of the world by 2025.
- The UK government mentioned that the funding that will be raised from the summit will not only protect the children from deadly diseases like diphtheria, polio, and measles to save up to 8 million lives but it will also help in ensuring a global recovery from Coronavirus pandemic.
- PM Boris Johnson stated that the UK is the single biggest donor to the international effort for finding the COVID-19 vaccine. It will also remain the world's leading donor to GAVI as it will be contributing 1.65 billion pounds over the next five years.
- UK government had mentioned that vaccinating children against the other deadly diseases will protect the healthcare systems of the world's poorest countries so that they can also cope with rising cases of COVID-19.
- UK has also been the single largest donor of any country to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI).

Why Global Vaccine Summit was important?

Presently as the entire world is focused on tackling Coronavirus, UNICEF, World Health Organization (WHO) and GAVI have warned the countries that the pandemic has been disrupting routine immunisation, which affects approximately 80 million children under the age of one across 68 countries.

Anne-Marie Trevelyan, UK International Development Secretary, stated that as the world is quite rightly focused on responding to the invisible killer, the ongoing pandemic cannot disrupt the routine immunisation of some of the world's poorest countries. It can cause other deadly diseases to spread across the globe.

She further stated that we all know vaccines work which is why at today's summit everyone should step up and pledge funds to GAVI. It will help to continue saving the lives of millions of children as well as protect everyone from the deadly diseases.

GAVI has also been addressing the immediate needs triggered by COVID-19. It also provides immediate medical supplies and helps in increasing testing and surveillance of the disease.

During the summit, it was also mentioned that if an effective and safe COVID-19 vaccine is developed, GAVI will play a role in its delivery around the world which will ensure a collective global recovery and will also reduce a risk of future waves of infection.

CEO of GAVI, the vaccine alliance, Dr. Seth Berkley mentioned that in the past decade, incredible progress boosting vaccine coverage has been witnessed in the world's poorest countries and more children in more countries are now protected against diseases than any point in history.

However, COVID-19 has put disruption to the vaccine programmes worldwide and there is now a real prospect of a resurgence of diseases such as yellow fever, polio, measles. Berkley further added that this is why the Global Vaccine Summit is important as it will bring leaders from around the world to build global health security and keep everyone safe from future outbreaks.

PM Narendra Modi attends the Global Vaccine Summit:

While addressing the summit, PM Modi mentioned that India's support to GAVI is not just financial but also our huge demand will bring down the global price of vaccines.

He further added that in today's challenging context, India stands in solidarity with the world. He also assured that our capacity to produce quality medicines, our own domestic experience in rapidly expanding the immunisation, producing vaccines at low cost, and our scientific research talent is all at service to humanity.

PM Modi pledged that the world can count on India's support in the mission of vaccination against the diseases. He also highlighted India's role as the world's fourth-largest producer of the vaccines.

Indian Prime Minister also talked about the government's mission Indradhanush that aims at assuring the full vaccination of children and pregnant women. He informed that India has been fortunate to contribute to the immunisation of 60 percent of the world's children.

In his address, PM Modi also mentioned that India recognizes and values the work of GAVI and stated that its not just a global alliance but also a symbol of solidarity and a reminder that by helping others, we can help ourselves also.

Australia shows strong support for India's NSG membership



Australia on June 4 showed its strong support for India's membership to Nuclear Supplier Groups (NSG). It also restated its backing for India's candidacy for a permanent seat in a reformed United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The support from Australia was mentioned in the joint statement which was released after an online summit between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Scott Morrison.

Australia reiterated its support for India's candidacy for permanent membership of UNSC for the term 2021-22. India had earlier formally applied for the NSG membership in May 2016.

Australia's support to India's NSG membership bid:

The joint statement released after the summit mentioned that both the sides have reiterated their support for the continued bilateral civil nuclear cooperation as well as their commitment to further strengthen the global non-proliferation. Australia has also expressed its strong support for India's membership of the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG).

The NSG is a 48 Nation Grouping that regulates global nuclear commerce and admission of the new members is done through consensus. India had applied for the

membership in 2016 and even though India has the backing of the majority of group members, China has continued to clock its entry into the bloc.

India- Australia discussed partnerships in different areas:

- As per the joint statement, during the talks, Australia welcomed the International Energy Agency (IEA) strategic partnership with India, as it looks forward to working closely on building stronger ties between the IEA community and India.
- The two countries have also vowed to strengthen cooperation in the fields of environment and energy.
- Both the countries during the summit had also decided to progress their energy dialogue for cooperation in areas such as cost-effective battery technologies, pumped hydro-storage, hydrogen and coal gasification, fly ash management technologies, adoption of clean energy technology and solar forecasting and scheduling.
- Both the countries will also continue to collaborate on energy security, climate change, and other issues of importance, especially through the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and International Solar Alliance (ISA). Australia is the founding member of both organisations.
- The countries noted that research, education, skill have been a central component of their relationship and the exchange of students and academics between them generates valuable people to people links.
- The countries also agreed to continue efforts on expanding partnerships in these areas, including deepening research collaboration.
- The joint statement also mentioned that the countries have concluded a new Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in vocational training and education to forge new bonds of cooperation in program delivery, policy development, and information exchange.
- In the tourism sector, both India and Australia decided to renew 2015 MoU to identify opportunities to deepen, strengthen, and broaden the cooperation in the tourism, travel, and aviation sector.
- Both sides also agreed to work to deepen the diaspora and community level contact as the growing contribution of Indian-Australians to the bilateral relations.

- The countries also decided to have a senior-level dialogue to discuss India's proposed draft on Migration and Mobility Partnership arrangement.

Plan to increase contact between both countries:

To deepen economic and strategic cooperation in the future and to provide oversight of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), India and Australia planned on increasing the frequency of Prime Ministerial Contact through reciprocal bilateral visits and annual meetings.

The Joint statement mentioned that to pursue CSP, Defence and Foreign Ministers will meet in a '2+2' format to discuss strategic issues at least in every two years.

Both countries have also decided to have regular meetings under the Foreign Ministers Framework Dialogue (FMFD). They have also decided to continue their annual meeting of Australia-India Joint Ministerial Commission. To enhance trade and investment relations.

The virtual summit between the two countries was yet another milestone in furthering the deep, longstanding, cooperative ties between India and Australia.

Russia declares state of emergency after massive fuel spill in Arctic Circle



Russian President Vladimir Putin declared a state of emergency on June 4, 2020 after a massive fuel spill in the Arctic Circle. At least 20,000 tonnes of diesel leaked from a power plant in Norilsk last week and spilled into the Ambarnaya River in Siberia, making it turn red.

Russia has imposed a state of emergency in the region, as emergency workers and maritime clean-up specialists are putting in intensive efforts to clean up the fuel spill.

The major diesel spill reportedly took place on May 29, 2020 after a fuel tank at a power plant ruptured in the Siberian city of Norilsk. The city is located above the Arctic Circle in north-central Russia.

How did the fuel spill occur?

A fuel reservoir reportedly collapsed at the power plant in Norilsk. The leakage caused 20,000 tons of diesel fuel to spill into the nearby Ambarnaya River. According to Norilsk Nickel, the fuel tank that ruptured causing the spill was damaged earlier, when supporting pillars that had "held it in place for nearly 30 years began to sink.

Russian President slammed the head of the Norilsk Nickel subsidiary (NTEK), which runs the power plant, for failing to report the oil leakage. Putin allegedly found out about the oil spill two days later when people started posting pictures of the red river on their social media pages. However, Norilsk Nickel maintains that NTEK had reported the incident in a "timely and proper" manner.

Why has Russia declared a state of emergency?

The Russian President stated that a declaration of national emergency was needed to call in more resources for the cleanup effort. The massive oil spill is the second largest accident in modern Russian history in terms of volume, according to World Wildlife Fund expert Alexei Knizhnikov. The largest-ever accident in Russia involved an oil spill in the northwestern region of Komi, which took place over several months in 1994.

Key Highlights

- Russian Emergencies Minister Yevgeny Zinichev is expected to manage the massive clean-up operation.
- The Russian Investigative Committee has announced that it has launched three criminal probes over environmental violations and also detained an employee of the power plant.
- The committee also released video footage, which has been shot on a mobile phone and appears to show fuel leaking from the reservoir, under a fence.
- Diesel fuel being lighter than oil is likely to evaporate rather than sink but it would be more toxic to clean up, according to environmental experts.
- The fuel spill has drifted at least 12 km on the Ambarnaya river's surface, turning its colour into crimson red.

What is the extent of the damage?

At least 12 km of the Ambarnaya river's surface has been polluted by the spill. According to Environmentalists, the river would be difficult to clean, especially given its shallow waters and remote locations, as well as the magnitude of the spill.

What does this have to do with permafrost?

The Norilsk city was constructed on permafrost like other infrastructure in the Arctic region on the assumption that it would be permanent. However, climate change has caused the temperature to rise, resulting in the melting of ice, which is impacting the infrastructure of the city and other areas in Siberia and the Arctic region.

Siberia along with the Arctic is warming at a much faster rate than other regions, which is raising concerns about its melting permafrost. The Norilsk city is in fact, in a part of Siberia that has experienced unusually warm temperatures this time of the year, at least 5.4 degrees above the long-term average, according to US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

What is permafrost?

Permafrost is ground that remains frozen. It can be located on land or even under the ocean. Permafrost does not necessarily have to be the first layer on the ground, it can be an inch to over miles deep into the Earth's surface. Around 85 percent of Alaska, Canada, Siberia and Greenland are sitting on top of a permafrost layer. Permafrost is formed when ice holds different kinds of soil, rock and sand together.

Background

This is not the first spill involving Norilsk Nickel, Russian nickel and palladium mining company. In 2016, an accident in another one of its plants had led fuel to leak into a nearby river, turning it red. The company was fined less than \$1,000 for the incident. Norilsk Nickel is the leading producer of nickel and palladium in the world. The company is one of the main employers in the industrial city of Norilsk, which is a permanent home to around 175,000 people.

G20 pledge over USD21 billion to fight COVID-19 pandemic

The member countries of the G20 Group have pledged to donate more than USD21 billion to fight the COVID-19 Pandemic. The announcement was made by the group on June 6, 2020.

As per the statement released by the group, the pledge will be directed towards vaccines, diagnostics, therapeutics, and research and development.



In April 2020, the group has called on all the non-governmental organizations, countries, philanthropies and the private sector to help close a financing gap that was estimated at over \$8 billion to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

The news of the pledge was shared by G20 Saudi Arabia on their official twitter handle.

The Statement released by G20 Group:

In an official statement, the group mentioned that G20 with invited countries has coordinated the global efforts in order to support the fight against COVID-19 pandemic. To date, members of G20 and the invited countries have pledged over 21 billion USD in order to support the funding in global health.

The current G20 chair, Saudi Arabia pledged \$500 million to support global efforts to combat Coronavirus pandemic. The country stated that it will allocate \$150 million to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisations, \$150 million to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation, and \$200 million to other health organisations and programmes.

Initial pledge by the group in March 2020:

The announcement after G20 has already injected more than USD 5 trillion into the global economy in late March 2020 to fight the virus and its impact on the economy.

The statement by G20 leaders mentioned that over USD 5 trillion has been injected into the global economy as a part of the targeted economic measures, fiscal policy, and guarantee schemes to counteract the economic, social, and financial impacts of the pandemic.

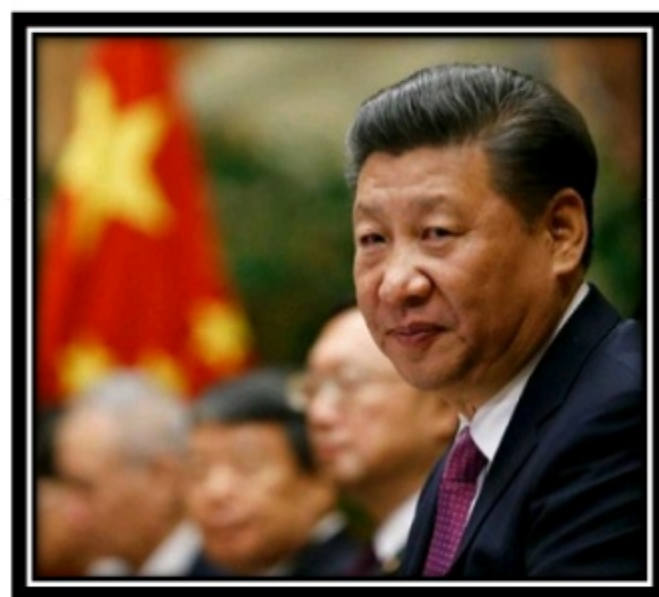
They also added that emergency measures that aim at protecting health will be proportionate, targeted, temporary, and targeted. The group has been strongly committed to present a united front against this common global threat.

The G20 leaders at that time had also asked the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to support the countries in need by using all instruments to the full extent.

International Parliamentary Alliance: Lawmakers from 8 countries form alliance against China

Senior lawmakers from eight countries including the US and UK have come together to form a new International Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC). The alliance aims to counter China's growing threat to global trade, human rights and security.

The International Parliamentary Alliance to counter China is the first-of-its-kind. It includes 18 Members of Parliament (MPs) from Europe, the UK, the United States and few other nations. The lawmakers aim to push for tough positioning against China's communist party regime, especially its handling of COVID-19 pandemic and its moves in Hong Kong. "



Inter-Parliamentary Alliance includes MPs from the following eight nations:

The United States

Europ

The United Kingdo

Japa

Australi

Canad

Norwa

Sweden

IPAC Members

The IPAC includes two US Senators- Marco Rubio and Robert Menendez, who were the ones who had introduced a bill in 2019 calling for sanctions against China over its oppression against the Uyghur Muslims. A revised version of the bill was passed this year by the US Senate and House of Representatives and is awaiting the assent of US President Donald Trump.

Announcing the formation of the alliance, US senator Marco Rubio said in a video message that China under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party represents a global challenge.

Following are the other members of IPAC:

Miriam Lexmann MEP- European Parliament

Reinhard Butikofer -European Parliament

Michael Brand- Germany

Margarete Bause- Germany

Baroness Helena Kennedy- UK

Sir Iain Duncan-Smith - UK

Shiori Yamao- Japan

Gen Nakatani- Japan

Elisabet Lann- Sweden

Fredrik Malm - Sweden

Irwin Cotier- Canada

Garnett Genuis- Canada

John McKay - Canada

Kimberly Kitching- Australia

Andrew Hastie- Australia

IPAC- What is it?

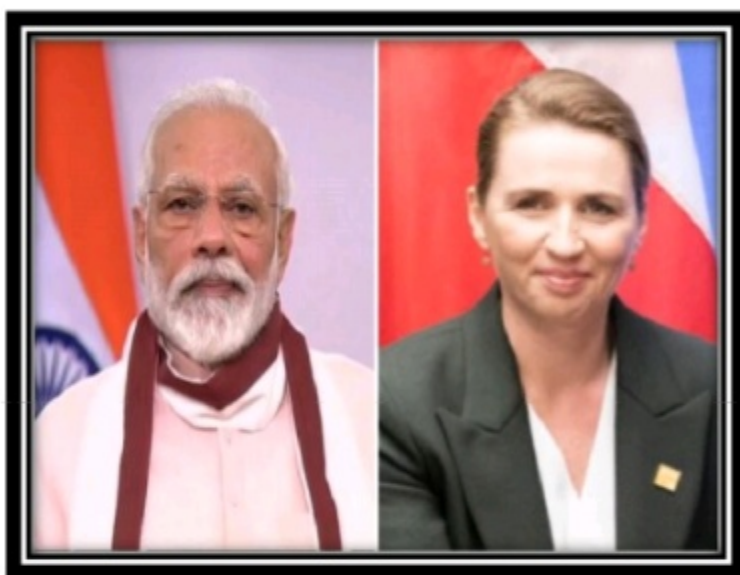
IPAC is an international cross-party alliance of lawmakers who have agreed to work together, towards reform on how democratic countries approach China.

The IPAC alliance believes that China's economic rise is systematically putting the global, rules-based order under severe pressure.

Focus

The alliance supports a free, open, and rules-based international order that supports human dignity is created and maintained through intention. The alliance aims to boost deeper collaborations between like-minded parliamentarians.

India, Denmark signs MoU for cooperation in power sector



Denmark and India on June 7, 2020, signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that aims at developing a deep, strong, and long-term cooperation in the power sector. The memorandum was signed between Denmark's Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate, and India's Power Ministry.

As per the power ministry statement, the MoU was signed by the Denmark Ambassador, Freddy Svane, and Secretary (Power) Sanjiv Nandan Sahai. The Joint Working Group (JWG) will also be established under MoU.

The Indian electricity market will be benefitted from cooperation with Denmark. The Indian government will also take necessary steps to promote and encourage technical and strategic cooperation in the power sector for the mutual benefit in the areas identified through MoU.

What does this collaboration mean?

The MoU signed between two countries will provide collaboration in areas such as long term energy planning, offshore wind, flexibility in the grid, forecasting, consolidation of grid codes to operate and integrate efficiently variable generation options, variability in renewable energy production, incentivize power plant flexibility, flexibility in the power purchase agreement, etc.

The Joint Working group (JWG) established under MoU will be co-chaired by Joint Secretary level officials. It will report to a Steering committee that will be jointly chaired by the Secretary level officer from both the side.

Background:

In April 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired Union Cabinet had given its approval for a Cooperation Agreement between Ministry for Energy, Utilities and

Climate of Denmark and Ministry of New and Renewable Energy in India on the strategic sector cooperation in the renewable energy field along with a focus on offshore wind energy.

A letter was also signed to establish an India-Danish Centre of Excellence for Renewable Energy in India. The cooperation agreement was signed to promote cooperation between the two countries in the field of renewable energy while giving a special focus on offshore wind.

Nepal's President approves controversial bill to revise national map including three Indian territories

Nepal's President Bidhya Devi Bhandari on June 18, 2020 approved the Constitution Amendment Bill that seeks to update the nation's political map by including areas claimed by India. The bill was passed earlier in the day by Nepal's upper house of the Parliament, National Assembly with unanimous support. All 57 members of the house voted in favour of the bill.



The New Map Amendment Bill (Coat of Arms) was approved by Nepal's House of Representatives last week. The lower house had also given its unanimous approval to the bill. The controversial bill proposes to include three Indian territories in Nepal's revised map.

As per government sources, India is disappointed with the manner in which Nepal went ahead with revising its map without trying to create a conducive atmosphere for talks. India has rejected Nepal's claim to the three Indian areas of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura in Uttarakhand, saying that the artificial enlargement of their national map is not based on historical facts and evidence and violates their current understanding to conduct talks on outstanding border issues.

Nepal's lower house of the Parliament had taken up the controversial amendment bill for discussion on June 9, 2020.

The bill was first tabled in the parliament by Nepalese Law Minister Shivamaya Tumbahangphe on May 31, 2020. The controversial amendment bill sought to incorporate an updated political map in the Constitution of Nepal- 2072. The new political map of Nepal depicts Indian areas of Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura within its own borders.

Objective

The constitution amendment bill sought to amend Schedule 3 of Nepal's constitution to update the nation's political map in the national emblem.

Key Highlights

- Under Nepal's law, a constitution amendment bill required two-thirds majority vote to pass in the Parliament.
- Nepal's upper house voted unanimously to approve the constitution amendment bill. The house has a total of 59 seats, of which one is vacant and the Chairman of the House cannot vote unless his vote is supposed to play a decisive role.
- Nepal PM KP Sharma Oli's ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) enjoys a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, but it falls short of a majority by around 10 seats in the lower house.
- The main opposition party- the Nepali Congress party had sought time for discussion on the issue and KP Sharma Oli's government had delayed the discussion on the bill, which was earlier scheduled for May 27.
- Following the discussion, the Nepali Congress, which has 63 seats in Nepal's lower house- House of Representatives, had agreed to support the amendment proposal, giving the ruling government its required majority in the house to pass the bill to revise Nepal's political map. The House has a total of 275 seats.

Nepal Map Controversy: All You Need to Know

The Nepal Government had earlier on May 28 delayed the discussion in the Parliament on the constitutional amendment bill. Nepal's Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli stated that he wanted to hold an all-party meeting to discuss the issue to forge national consensus before moving the Constitution amendment proposal forward amid rising tensions with India.

The Nepal government had on May 18 released a revised political and administrative map, laying claim to strategic key areas along the border between the two countries-

Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani.

India sharply rejected Nepal's new political map and asked Nepal not to resort to any artificial enlargement of its territorial claim. The Union Ministry of External Affairs said the revised map of Nepal included parts of the Indian territory. India claims the three territories to be a part of its union.

What is Lipulekh territory dispute?

The Lipulekh pass is located at the trijunction between India's Uttarakhand state, Tibet region of China and Nepal. It has been used since ancient times by traders and pilgrims traveling between India and Tibet. It is also used by pilgrims for the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra.

Tensions over the pass resurfaced in May 2020 after India inaugurated an 80-km-long road on the pass, connecting Ghatiaabgarh and Lipulekh in Uttarakhand, to reduce travel time for pilgrims going for the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. Nepal claims to the southern side of the pass called the Kalapani Territory.

What is Kalapani territory dispute?

Kalapani is a disputed territory between India and Nepal that lies at an altitude of 3600m on the Kailash Manasarovar route. It borders Indian state of Uttarakhand and Nepal's Sudurpashchim Pradesh.

India claims Kalapani to be a part of the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand, while Nepal claims it to be a part of its Dharchula district.

Background

India had released its new political map on November 2, 2019. The map depicts geographical areas of the newly-carved Union Territories-Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. The map also showed Kalapani as a part of its own territory.

-X-----X-----X-

States

Garisain declared as Uttarakhand's summer capital



Bhararisen (Garisain) in the Chamoli district has been declared as Uttarakhand's new summer capital. The Government of Uttarakhand made the announcement on June 8, 2020.

The Uttarakhand Chief Secretary Utpal Kumar Singh issued a notification on June 8 informing that the state's Governor has given her assent for the

declaration of Bhararisen (Garisain) district Chamoli as Uttarakhand's summer capital.

Significance

The landmark decision makes Uttarakhand the second state in India after Jammu and Kashmir to have two capitals, separate summer and winter capital.

Garisain: All you need to know!

- Garisain is a town and Nagar Panchayat in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. It is located at the centre of the state, around 250 km away from Dehradun.
- Though the town comes under the administrative limits of the Garhwal division, the boundary of the Kumaon division also starts approximately 15 km from the town.
- So the town is easily accessible from both the Garhwal and the Kumaon divisions and in a way acts as a bridge between the two regions.

Garisain envisaged as state capital?

Garisain was envisaged as the Uttarakhand's capital during the agitation for statehood. However, at the time of the formation of the state on November 9, 2000, Dehradun was made the temporary capital of the state.

Many Vidhan Sabha sessions have been held at Gairsain. However, the successive state governments never pushed the issue of making the town its permanent capital and nor did they consider VN Dixit Commission's report that aimed to resolve the issue.

A three-day-long assembly session of Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly was held at Gairsain in June 2014. This raised hopes of the town being proposed as the permanent capital of the state in the near future.

VN Dixit Commission

- The Uttarakhand government had set up a VN Dixit Commission to search for a permanent capital.
- The commission had looked into the feasibility of five places -Dehradun, Gairsain, Rishikesh, Kashipur and Ramnagar- as the permanent capital of Uttarakhand.
- The commission checked the feasibility of the places based on several parameters including geographical conditions, population, accessibility, transport system, seismic conditions and security.
- The commission in its final report in 2008 had noted that the interim capital, Dehradun, is more suited to be the permanent capital of the state owing to factors including its nearness to the national capital, safety from natural calamities and centralised population.
- The commission has rejected the proposal of making Gairsain the permanent capital of the state as it is more prone to earthquakes.

Background

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat had announced after his budget speech in the state assembly on March 4 that the government had decided to make Gairsain as the state's summer capital.

The Chief Minister dedicated the declaration of Gairsain as the summer capital to the thousands of men and women of Uttarakhand who had fought for its statehood.

Uttarakhand was carved out of Uttar Pradesh to become India's 27th state on November 9, 2000. Gairsain has remained a sensitive issue in the hill state ever since its creation.

Kerala govt to roll out K-FON free internet project by December 2020



Kerala Chief Minister, Pinarayi Vijayan has announced that Kerala Fibre Optic Network Project (K-FON) project that will provide free internet access to the poor will roll out by December 2020.

The CM of Kerala made an announcement about the project after a meeting with heads of companies of the consortium executing Rs.

1,500 crore for the project. He also mentioned that no state in India has implemented such a scheme.

Pinarayi Vijayan informed that despite the delay due to the nationwide COVID-19 lockdown, CMD of Consortium leader BEL, MV Gautam has promised that the project will be completed by December 2020.

Significance of the project:

The Chief Minister of Kerala state mentioned that the project will be of immense benefit for the state as K-FON will bring internet connectivity to hospitals, schools, government officers, and other institutions.

Key Highlights:

- The CM of Kerala during the announcement regarding the project mentioned that Kerala is the first state that has declared the internet as a fundamental right to its citizens.

- K-FON project was launched with an aim to provide quality internet which will be free of cost for the poor and at an affordable price for the others.
- The consortium for the project comprises of public sector companies, Railtel and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) and private companies such as LS Cables and SRIT.

About K-FON Project:

The project has been implemented by Kerala State IT Infrastructure Limited and Kerala State Electricity Board. Optical fibre cables were laid across the state using KSEB posts.

Regarding the project, Kerala Chief Minister mentioned that it would act as a “catalyst for the knowledge-based economy envisioned by the state”. While noting that the importance and relevance of the internet will grow in the post-COVID-19 scenario, the CM added that the use of the internet in sectors such as banking and education will greatly increase. He informed that K-FON will provide major support to the government’s efforts to develop Kerala as the world’s leading educational, industrial, and tourism destination.

Govt approves renaming of Kolkata Port Trust as Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port Trust



The central government on June 3 approved to rename the Kolkata Port Trust as Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port trust. The Information and Broadcasting Minister, Prakash Javadekar informed that PM Narendra Modi had announced about renaming the port trust on January 11, 2020.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi made the announcement of renaming the port after Jan Sangh Founder while addressing the 150th-anniversary programme of Kolkata Port Trust. As per the release, the union cabinet has given its approval now to rename the port.

The Kolkata Port is the first major port and the only riverine port in India. On October 17, 1870, it came to be governed by a trust, on the appointment of the commissioners for the improvement of the port of Calcutta as per Act V of 1870.

Renaming of Kolkata Port Trust:

As per the Ministry of Shipping release, the board of trustees of Kolkata Port Trust in its meeting on February 25, 2020, had passed a resolution to rename Kolkata Port Trust as Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata. The decision by the trust was taken considering him a multifaceted genius as an academician, eminent jurist, thinker, and the leader of the masses.

The release further added that Kolkata Port has traversed 150 years. In this journey, it has been India's gateway to commerce, trade, and economic development. The port has also been a witness to India's struggle of Independence, socio-cultural changes, and World War I & II, especially in Eastern India.

Renaming of other Ports:

- Nhava Sheva Port Trust was renamed as Jawaharlal Nehru port Trust in 1989.
- The Tuticorin Port Trust was also renamed as V.O. Chidambaranar Port Trust by the government in 2011.
- Ennore Port Trust Limited was renamed as Kamarajar Port Limited. Shri K Kamarajar was an eminent freedom fighter and former CM of Tamil Nadu.
- Kandla Port was renamed as Deendayal Port in 2017.

About Syama Prasad Mookerjee:

Syama Prasad Mookerjee was a barrister, Indian politician, and academician. He also served as the Minister for Industry and Supply in PM Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet. After the falling out with Nehru, with the help of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), he founded Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) in 1951, which is a predecessor to the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP).

As BJP is a successor to Bhartiya Jan Sangh, Mookerjee has been regarded as the founder of the Bharatiya Janta Party.

Syama Prasad Mookerjee was born July 1, 1901, in a Bengali Hindu Brahmin Family, in Calcutta. Mookerjee was also the President of Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahasabha from 1943 to 1946.

He passed away in 1953 in the custody of Jammu & Kashmir Police. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, in 2004 had claimed that he was murdered in a 'Nehru Conspiracy'.

Maharashtra Gram Panchayat elections postponed due to COVID-19



The Maharashtra Gram Panchayat elections have been postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The announcement was made by the Maharashtra Rural Development Minister Hasan Mushrif.

The state rural development minister stated that a request was made to the State Election Commission by the State

Government to postpone the elections to the 12,668 Gram Panchayats that were scheduled between July-December 2020 in the view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maharashtra Gram Panchayat elections: Key Highlights

- The elections were scheduled for all gram panchayats whose tenure is supposed to end between June and December 2020.
- The state government, with its rising COVID-19 cases, conveyed its inability to hold elections in the present situation to the state election commission.
- The State Election Commission has informed the state that the existing executive of the gram panchayats, whose term is ending, will not continue in the same manner.
- The Election Commission further directed the state government to appoint a suitable administrator in these gram panchayats.
- This indicates that the gram panchayats, whose five-year terms are expiring, will not get a six-month extension or given the role of a caretaker as they were demanding.

- The state election commission will be reviewing the situation from time to time in consultation with the state government.

Who is an administrator?

The administrator is an official, who is selected by the government, to monitor the works of gram panchayats.

Why have Maharashtra Gram Panchayat elections been postponed?

The Maharashtra Gram Panchayat elections have been postponed to prevent further spread of the COVID-19 virus. If the elections are held, many people will gather in public places through staff training, community use of voting machines, campaign crowds, meetings and rallies. According to state rural development minister Hasan Mushrif, such crowds can be dangerous in the state's present situation.

Background

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Maha Vikas Aghadi had proposed that these gram panchayats should have an administrator till fresh elections take place. The state government was against giving the gram panchayats an extension for six months.

Kerala government cancels Sabarimala Temple annual festival

Kerala government on June 11 has decided to cancel this year's Sabarimala annual festival and has indefinitely postponed the opening of the hill shrine due to COVID-19. The festival was scheduled to begin on June 19, 2020.

The decision was taken after the state government held a closed-door meeting with Sabarimala Tantri Kandararu Mahesh Mohanaru and Travancore Devaswom Board officials in Thiruvananthapuram. The temple was earlier scheduled to be open from June 14 for the monthly pujas.



Tantri had earlier written a letter to Devaswom Board Officials on June 10 highlighting the necessity of conducting a high-level meeting. The letter also mentioned that the pilgrims should not be allowed to enter Sabarimala Temple because of the worsening COVID-19 situation.

Tantri Mahesh on canceling the opening of Sabarimala Temple:

Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) President and Commissioner, N Vasu had stated that he had consulted with Tantri along with the senior members of his family before recommending that Sabarimala temple can be opened from June 14 for the monthly pujas.

Tantri Mahesh clearing the air on whether he was or was not consulted earlier regarding the opening of the temple and the festival stated that the decision to open Sabarimala was not taken arbitrarily by TDB. He mentioned that he had written to TDB earlier and had agreed that the festival can take place on the scheduled date which was June 19.

He further cleared that when the TDB commissioner spoke to him before or after the video conference with the state's Chief Minister, he did not say anything against the decision as it was issued directly from the centre. It was later that it was realised that the temples must take an independent stand on the issue.

He clarified that his approach was purely practical and he was not under any kind of pressure. The concern and deciding factor were health and no one had attempted to pressure him. He explained that the situation has become worse and if anyone tests positive, the festival will be affected.

The tantris also mentioned that the Kerala State government has always acted in the best interests of the devotees and officials were highly receptive once the issue was raised.

Background:

The President of Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB), N Vasu had confirmed and announced on June 10 that the Sabarimala temple festival will start from June 19, 2020.

TDB President had further added that the temple will open on June 14 for the monthly pujas as it has been discussed with both tantris of the temple and only with their consultation and cooperation, the decision has been taken.

He informed that before the festival on June 19, there will be monthly pujas from 14 June and the Arat ceremony will be conducted on June 20 at Pampa river.

Bihar Legislative Council Elections to be held on July 6



The Election Commission of India has informed that the elections for the 9 vacant seats in Bihar Legislative Council will be on July 6, 2020.

The tenure of the nine members of the Bihar Legislative Council elected by the Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) had ended on May 6.

Due to the prevailing condition of public health emergency due to the rising cases of COVID-19 and the orders passed under the Disaster Management Act, 2005 by the authority, the Election Commission had passed the order on April 3 and had directed that the process of election to these seats shall be initiated at a later date.

Schedule of the election:

- The electoral body informed that the notification will be issued on June 18 and the last date for making nominations will be June 25.
- The scrutiny of nominations will be on June 26 and the last date for the withdrawal of candidatures will be June 29.
- Polling for the seats will be from 9 am to 4 pm on July 6 and the counting of votes will be on the same day at 5 pm.

Bihar Legislative Council Elections:

The members whose tenure ended on May 6 2020 are Krishna Kumar Singh, Ashok Choudhary, Prashant Kumar Shahi, Satish Kumar, Sanjay Prakash, Radha Mohan Sharma, Md Haroon Rashid, Sonelal Mehta, and Hira Prasad Vind.

The electoral body has already directed the Chief Secretary of Bihar to depute a senior official from the state for ensuring that the extant instructions regarding the COVID-19 containment measures have been complied with while making arrangements for conducting the elections.

Delhi government plans world's largest COVID makeshift hospital with 10,000 beds

The Delhi government has been planning a 10,000-bed makeshift hospital for the treatment of COVID-19 patients under a sprawling tent in South Delhi. The world's largest COVID-19 facility will be as large as over 22 football fields.

The planned facility with 10,000 beds and over 200 halls will come up at the South Delhi Campus of spiritual organisation Radha Soami Satsang Beas. The facility along with having a provision of the treatment will also provide accommodation for the doctors.

As per the secretary of Radha Soami Satsang Beas, Vikas Sethi, the COVID-19 facility will be 1,700 feet long and 700 feet wide. It will also have 200 enclosures with 50 beds each. The spiritual center is located near the Delhi-Haryana border.

Key Highlights:

- The makeshift hospital will be the largest facility in Delhi so far. The complex is expected to be completely ready by June 30 for the treatment of COVID-19 patients.
- The complex has been constructed with tents, it will also have adequate lighting and fans. Coolers will also be installed in each hall of the facility.

- The spiritual organisation gave its approval for the COVID-29 facility only a few days back.
- On June 14, Delhi's Lieutenant General Anil Baijlal had visited the spiritual centre and was informed about the arrangement plans of the facility.

Delhi preparing for rising COVID-19 cases:

As Delhi faces the problem of shortage of beds for the treatment of COVID-19 patients, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has been planning of arranging 20,000 beds to deal with the crisis. To achieve the target, around 4,000 beds will be arranged in 40 small and big hotels in Delhi.

In order to deal with the shortage of beds for COVID-19 patients, the central government has also decided to provide 500 railway coaches to Delhi which will be turned into the facility centre for the treatment of the patients.

Delhi has a total of 9,647 dedicated COVID-19 beds in central, state-run and private hospitals. Out of these, 5,402 are already occupied.

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News Capsule

Javed Akhtar becomes first Indian to win prestigious Richard Dawkins Award

Javed Akhtar, veteran Bollywood writer, and lyricist has become the first Indian to receive the Richard Dawkins Award 2020. He won the award for advancing human progress, critical thinking, and humanist value.

The award named after English evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins has been presented since 2003. The prestigious award is given to a distinguished individual from the world of scholarship, science, entertainment, and education.



The previous recipients of this prestigious award include English- American intellectual, social critic, writer, and philosopher Christopher Hitchens and American TV Host, political commentator and comedian Bill Maher.

Javed Akhtar on receiving the prestigious award:

Javed Akhtar who became the first Indian to receive the award has been known for his views on polity, art, culture, society, secularism, rising communal tensions, and religion. On hearing the news he mentioned that he was deeply honoured as he has been a great admirer of Richard Dawkins ever since he read his first book 'The Selfish Gene'.

Mr. Akhtar received an email from Richard Dawkins informing that he has been unanimously selected for the award by the board of the centre for Inquiry USA in which The Richard Dawkins Foundation has been housed. The winner of the award further informed that Richard Dawkins has always been a fierce advocate of empirical science over superstition.

Being a great admirer of Dawkins, he has read all his books and that has strengthened his own views on the need to expose religious dogma as an enemy of rationality and critical thinking.

Shabana, Azmi, the evergreen and extremely talented actress and Javed Akhtar's wife shared the news through her official Twitter account. She stated that the award's relevance has become much more prominent in the current times as when secularism is under attack.

Javed Akhtar's notable work:

Apart from the honour of receiving the Richard Dawkins Award, the famous lyricist, screenwriter and poet have also won many other prestigious awards for his notable work in the Indian cinema.

Akhtar has been a recipient of 5 National awards for the best lyricist for the movies Border, Lagaan, Refugee, Godmother, and Saaz. With an abundance of Filmfare awards in his name, he also won Sahitya Akademi Award in 2013 in Urdu. He was awarded Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2007.

Javed Akhtar has been known for his screenplay for the iconic movies such as Sholay, Deewar, Zanjeer along with Salim Khan. These movies also starred Bollywood Superstar Amitabh Bachchan.

About the Richard Dawkins Award:

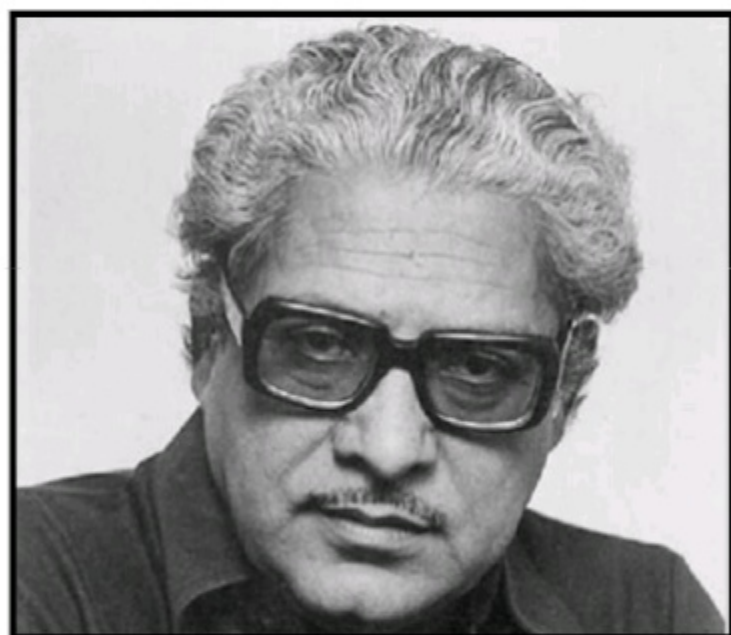
Richard Dawkins is an annual award that has been presented by the Atheist Alliance of America. In 2019, it moved to the Centre for Enquiry. The award has been presented since 2003 and has been named after Richard Dawkins. He is an English evolutionary biologist who was named as the world's top thinker in 2013 reader's poll of the prospect magazine.

The award is given to distinguished individuals for their notable work in the fields of education, entertainment, science, or scholarship. The recipient must also publicly proclaim the values of rationalism and secularism while upholding the scientific truth wherever it may lead.

In 2019, Ricky Gervais was awarded Richard Dawkins award who is an English comedian, writer, actor, producer, and director.

Some other notable personalities honoured with this award are Stephen Fry, David Silverman, Lawrence M. Krauss, Jerry Coyne.

Legendary Filmmaker Basu Chatterjee passes away



Legendary Filmmaker Basu Chatterjee passed away on June 4, 2020 due to age-related health issues. He was 93.

Basu reportedly died in his sleep at his Santacruz residence. The news of his death was confirmed by Ashoke Pandit, president of the Indian Film & Television Directors' Association (IFTDA).

Pandit tweeted saying that veteran filmmaker passed away peacefully in his sleep in the morning. He informed the last rites of the late filmmaker will be held at 3 pm at Santacruz cremation ground.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also tweeted to pay her condolences to Basu's family, friends and fans and the film fraternity. She said that the legendary film director and screenwriter Basu Chatterjee had given gems like 'Chhoti Si Baat', 'Chitchor', 'Rajanigandha', 'Byomkesh Bakshi', 'Rajni' among others.

Filmmaker Shoojit Sircar also tweeted saying that his first job as an assistant director was with Basu Chatterjee for a Bengali TV serial shot in CR Park, New Delhi.

Veteran Actress Shabana Azmi also tweeted saying that Basu Chatterjee was the pioneer of what came to be regarded as the middle of the road cinema. The actor had done three films with the filmmaker- Jeena Yahan, Swami and Apne Paraye.

Who was Basu Chatterjee?

- Basu Chatterjee was a prolific Indian film director and screenwriter. He along with other filmmakers such as Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Basu Bhattacharya were associated with what was later known as middle cinema or middle-of-the-road cinema during the 1970s and 1980s.

- Chatterjee's films were known to be largely real-life, which dealt with light-hearted stories of middle-class families often in urban settings, focusing on marital and love relationships.
- Some of his best works included *Piya Ka Ghar* (1972), *Rajnigandha* (1974), *Us Paar*, *Chhoti Si Baat* (1975), *Chitchor* (1976), *Khatta Meetha*, *Chakravyuha* (1978 film), *Baton Baton Mein* (1979), *Priyatama* (1977), *Man Pasand*, *Hamari Bahu Alka*, *Shaukeen* (1982)
- His films - *Ek Ruka Hua Faisla* (1986) and *Kamla Ki Maut* (1989)- were exceptions from his usual work of art, as they dealt with social and moral issues.
- The film *Chameli Ki Shaadi* (1986) was his last commercially successful movie.
- He also directed the popular TV Series *Byomkesh Bakshi* and *Rajani* for Doordarshan, both of which were successful TV serials.
- He was a member of the jury at the 10th Moscow International Film Festival in 1977. He was also a member of the International Film And Television Club of the Asian Academy of Film & Television.
- He had won the National Film Award for Best Film on Family Welfare for his film *Durga*. Besides this, he had won the IIFA Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007. He has also won several Filmfare awards.

Full List of Awards

2007: IIFA Lifetime Achievement Award

1992: National Film Award for Best Film on Family Welfare - *Durga*

1991: Filmfare Best Screenplay Award - *Kamla Ki Maut*

1980: Filmfare Critics Award for Best Movie - *Jeena Yahan*

1978: Filmfare Best Director Award - *Swami*

1977: Filmfare Best Screenplay Award - *Chitchor* Nominee

1976: Filmfare Best Screenplay Award - *Chhoti Si Baat*

1975: Filmfare Critics Award for Best Movie - *Rajnigandha*

1972: Filmfare Best Screenplay Award - *Sara Akash*

Kannada actor Chiranjeevi Sarja passes away at 39

Kannada actor Chiranjeevi Sarja passed away on June 7 at Apollo Hospital in Jayanagar, Bengaluru. The promising actor died of a heart attack and was declared dead on arrival. He was 39.

After he collapsed while speaking to his father on phone around 1.10 pm, the actor was rushed to Apollo hospital where doctors declared him dead. His throat swabs have been sent to the laboratory for a report.



The actor's last rites will be conducted at the farmhouse of his grandfather Shakti Prasad at Jakkenahalli in Tumakuru district on June 8. Due to the defined COVID-19 guidelines, only a few people, including his family members, few artists from the Kannada film industry, and some Jakkenahalli residents will be permitted to attend the funeral.

The Unit Head, Apollo Specialty Hospital, Dr. Govindaiah Yatheesh, stated that the actor was talking to his father. He was sweating and then he collapsed. The family rushed to the hospital at the same time, at around 2.20 pm they reached the hospital but he had already died on the way. The doctor explained that the cause of the death seemed cardiac but the family has requested an autopsy. The body has been handed to the police.

Karnataka Chief Minister, BS Yediyurappa offered his condolences on the death of the star actor through his official Twitter account.

About Chiranjeevi Sarja:

Cheeranjivi Sarja was born on October 17, 1980, in Bangalore, Karnataka. He was a rising Indian film actor who appeared in many Kannada films. Chiranjeevi completed his schooling from Baldwin Boys High school and graduated from Vijaya College Bangalore.

He worked as an assistant director for 4 years with his uncle Arjun Sarja. He got married to actress Meghana Raj in a Christian ceremony on April 30, 2018, and the traditional Hindu Wedding ceremony on May 2, 2018. He acted in 22 films starting

with the 2009 film 'Vayuputra', which earned him an Innovative Film Award for Best Debut (male).

Saturn's moon Titan drifting away faster than previously expected



A research done by NASA scientists and the Italian Space Agency has made implications for the entire Saturn system as well as other moons and planets.

Scientists had earlier thought that they knew the rate at which the Saturn's moon Titan has been moving away from its host planet but as per a discovery with data from NASA's Cassini Spacecraft, it has been found

that Titan is drifting hundred times faster than previously understood. It is about 4 inches (11 centimeters) every year.

Our moon has also been drifting away from Earth a tiny bit more each year, other moons have also been doing the same with their host planets.

Why the moon drifts away from their host planets?

The moon starts drifting away from its host planets because as a moon orbits, its gravity pulls on a planet which causes a temporary bulge in the planet as it passes.

With time, the energy created by subsiding and bulging, transfers from the planet to the moon and nudging it farther and farther out. Our own moon drifts 1.5 inches (3.8 centimeters) from the Earth each year.

What does this new finding mean?

While scientists have known that Saturn was formed 4.6 billion years ago in the early days of the solar system, there has been more of an uncertainty about the planet's rings and when its system of more than 80 moons was formed.

Titan is currently 1.2 million kilometers (7,59,000 miles) from Saturn. The revised date of the drift has suggested that the moon started out much closer to Saturn, meaning that the whole system expanded more quickly than previously believed.

As per Valery Lainey, the lead author of the work published in *Nature Astronomy*, this result brings an essential new piece of the puzzle for the highly debated question of the age of Saturn system and how its moons were formed.

Lainey had conducted the research as a scientist at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory which is in Southern California before joining the Paris Observatory at PSL University.

Titan's drift confirms new theory:

The findings that identify the Titan's rate of drift has also provided an important confirmation of a new theory that predicts and explains how the planets affect their moon's orbits.

Scientists have applied the same formula for the last 50 years to estimate how fast a moon drifts from its planet. This rate can also be used to determine the moon's age. These classical theories and formulas on which they were based were applied to the moon's large and small all over the solar system.

These classical theories assumed that in systems such as Saturn's, which has dozens of moons, the outer moons like Titan migrates outward more slowly than the moons closer in because they are farther from the gravity of their host planet.

But four years ago, Jim Fuller, a theoretical astrophysicist, now of Caltech had published research that upended those theories. Fuller's theory had predicted that outer moons can migrate outward at a similar rate as to the inner moons because they become locked in a different form of orbit pattern that links to the particular wobble of the planet and slings the moon outward.

Fuller, a co-author of the new paper, stated that the new measurements have implied that these kinds of planet-moon interactions can be prominent that prior expectations and that they can also apply to many systems such exoplanets- those outside our solar system, other planetary moon systems, and even binary star systems, where stars orbit each other.

In order to reach the results, the author had mapped stars in the background of Cassini images and had tracked Titan's position. They also compared them with an independent data set: radio science data collected by Cassini, in order to confirm their findings.

The spacecraft sent radio waves to the Earth, during ten close flybys between 2006 and 2016. Scientists then studied how the signal frequency had changed by their interactions with their surroundings in order to estimate how Titan's orbit evolved.

Co-Author Paolo Tortora, of the Italy's University of Bologna, who is also the member of the Cassini Radio Science Team and had worked on the research with the support of the Italian Space Agency mentioned that by using two completely different datasets, the results obtained were in full agreement and were also in agreement with Jim Fuller's theory that predicted a much faster migration of Titan.

Ramon Magsaysay awards 2020 canceled due to COVID-19 virus



Ramon Magsaysay awards, known as Asia's version of the Nobel Prize, have been canceled this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Manila-based foundation issued a statement on June 9, 2020 saying that it has no choice but to cancel the 2020 awards with COVID-19 almost immobilizing the world.

This is the third time that the annual awards have been cancelled in the last six decades, the first time was due to a financial crisis in 1970 and the second time when a disastrous earthquake hit the Philippines in 1990.

Ramon Magsaysay awards

- The Ramon Magsaysay Award is an annual award, which is named after seventh Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay who died in a plane crash in 1957.

- The award was established in April 1957 by the trustees of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund with the cooperation of the Philippine government.
- The award is conferred by the Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation to Asian individuals who achieve excellence in their respective fields and to honour those who selflessly serve to help others.
- The award was traditionally given in five categories- journalism, literature and creative communication arts; public service; government service; community leadership and peace and international understanding. Five categories, however, were discontinued in 2009.
- So far, the award has been conferred to more than 330 individuals including world leaders such as late Philippine President Corazon Aquino and Mother Teresa.

2019 Ramon Magsaysay Awardees

In 2019, the award was conferred to five individuals-

- 1. Kim Jong-Ki:** A South Korean who helped fight suicide and bullying.
- 2. Angkhana Neelapaijit:** A Thai woman who became a human rights defender after losing her husband to violence in southern Thailand.
- 3. Ravish Kumar:** The Indian Journalist was chosen for harnessing journalism to give voice to the voiceless.
- 4. Ko Swe Win:** He is a journalist from Myanmar, who was honoured for building the quality and force of media's truth-telling.
- 5. Raymundo Pujante Cayabyab:** A musician credited with shaping modern Philippine musical culture.

Background

The Philippines is a coronavirus hotspot in Southeast Asia with over 23,732 confirmed COVID-19 cases. The nation has so far reported 1,027 deaths. Similar to nations across the world, the Philippines has also eased lockdown restrictions for millions of people to bolster its economy, which contracted majorly in the first quarter.

Wajid Khan of Sajid-Wajid Music Composer Duo passes away



Bollywood Music Composer Wajid Khan of Sajid-Wajid music duo passed away on June 1, 2020. He was 42. Wajid was reportedly suffering from kidney ailments. As per reports, he was also diagnosed with COVID-19.

Wajid Khan had reportedly been admitted to Mumbai's Kokilaben Dhirubhai Ambani Hospital late on May 31 and was kept on ventilator. The news of his death was confirmed through a tweet by fellow Music Composer Salim Merchant, who tweeted saying "devastated with the news of the passing away of my brother Wajid of Sajid -Wajid fame. It's a huge loss to our fraternity. I'm shocked & broken ."

Sajid Khan and Wajid Khan were Bollywood Music Director brothers, sons of tabla player Ustad Sharafat Ali Khan. They are credited with composing music for several Salman Khan films including Pyar Kiya To Darna Kya, Wanted, Tere Naam, Partner, Hello, Ek Tha Tiger, Dabangg and Dabangg 2.

Sajid-Wajid Bollywood Career

- The popular music duo, Sajid-Wajid, had made their Bollywood debut with Salman Khan's hit film Pyaar Kiya Toh Darna Kya in 1998. Wajid Khan began his career as a singer with Salman Khan starrer Partner in 2008.
- The brothers composed music for several Salman Khan films including Hello Brother, Mujhse Shaadi Karogi, Chori Chori, Wanted, Partner, Dabangg, Dabangg 2, Dabangg 3, God Tussi Great Ho, Garv, Jai Ho, Veer, Ek Tha Tiger and Hello.
- They also composed music for many other renowned films including Housefull 2, Rowdy Rathore, Bullet Raja, Grand Masti and Satyameva Jayate to name a few.

- Some of their most popular tracks include the title track of Soni De Nakhre, Dabangg, Jalwa, Chinta Ta Ta Chita Chita and Fevicol Se. They also wrote songs including Hello Brother, Hata Saawan Ki Ghata and Chupke Se Koi Aayega.
- They had also composed the title tracks for the reality television show Big Boss season 4 and 6.
- They had also composed the theme song of IPL 4, "Dhoom Dhoom Dhoom Dhadaka". Wajid had sung the track.
- Among their recent works, Sajid-Wajid had composed Salman's popular "Bhai Bhai" single.

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Science & Technology

Kathy Lueders becomes first female head of NASA's Human Space Flight Program



Kathy Lueders has become the new Associate Administrator of HEO- Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate. This makes her the first female head of the human space flight program. NASA Administrator, Jim Bridenstine announced the news on June 12, 2020.

Lueders was a commercial crew manager and has been directing NASA's efforts to send astronauts to space on private spacecraft since 2014. Kathy Lueders oversaw the inaugural private crewed flight DEMO-2 from the Kennedy Space Centre in Florida in May 2020.

In a press release by NASA, it has been informed that the appointment will come into effect immediately. Steve Stich will be replacing Lueders as the Commercial Crew Program Manager while Ken Bowersox will return to his role as HEO deputy associate administrator.

Jim Bridenstine shared tweeted the news and mentioned that Kathy Lueders successfully managed both the commercial crew and commercial cargo programs and is the right person for the new position.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine on the appointment of Kathy Lueders:

NASA Administrator, Jim Bridenstine mentioned that Kathy gave us the passion and extraordinary experience that we need to continue to move forward with Artemis and in our goal of landing the first woman and first man on the moon by 2024.

He further mentioned that Kathy Lueders has a deep interest in developing commercial markets in space as her initial work on the space shuttle program. From

commercial Cargo and commercial crew, Lueders successfully and safely helped to push to expand the US's industrial base. She is the right person to extend the space economy to the lunar vicinity and to achieve the ambitious goals that we have been given.

Bridenstine thanked Ken Bowersox and the entire HEO team for supporting Kathy in making commercial crew a success. He also assured that the support to Lueders will continue as she moves out in her new role.

Kathy Lueders in NASA:

Kathy Lueders has a Bachelor of Business Administration in Finance from the University of New Mexico. She also has a Bachelor and Masters of Science in Industrial Engineering from New Mexico State University.

Lueders began her career in NASA in 1992 at the White Sands Test Facility in New Mexico as a Manager of Reactions Control Systems Depots and Shuttle Orbital Maneuvering System.

Later she moved on to the International Space Station Program, where she served as a transportation integration manager. She also led commercial cargo resupply services to the ISS.

She was responsible for NASA oversight of international partner spacecraft visiting the ISS. It included the H-II Transfer vehicle of Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, Automated Transfer Vehicle of European Space Agency, and Soyuz and Progress spacecraft of the Russian Space Agency Roscosmos.

In 2013, Kathy Lueders went to Kennedy as acting Commercial Crew Program Manager and in 2014 she was selected as the head of the office.

TAP: WHO launches COVID-19 Technology Access Pool



World Health Organization has launched COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) that aims at making tests, vaccines, treatments and other health technologies to fight COVID-19 as well as to make them accessible to all the countries.

More than 30 countries have signed up to support this initiative. C-TAP was first proposed by Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado in March 2020. He also joined WHO's Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus during the video launch of the initiative.

The nations who have not signed up for the WHO launched initiative are the economic powers such as France, China, Germany, Turkey, Japan, the US, and the UK.

Objective of C-TAP:

As per Carlos Alvarado, the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool will ensure that the latest and the best science will benefit all of humanity. He also added that tests, vaccines, treatments, diagnostics, and other key tools developed in the Coronavirus response must be made universally available as global public goods.

The aim of C-TAP will be to accelerate the medicines, discovery of vaccines and other technologies through open science research. It will also aim at fast-tracking the product development by mobilizing the additional manufacturing capacity.

Launch of COVID-19 Technology Access Pool:

During the video launch of C-TAP, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus stated that through C-TAP, companies, and governments have been invited who have developed an effective therapeutic to contribute the patent to the Medicines Patent Pool, which will then sub-license the patent to the generic manufacturers.

WHO also mentioned that the technology access pool will be based on social solidarity and will be voluntary. It added that the pool will provide a one-stop-shop for data, scientific knowledge, and intellectual property that can be shared equitably by the global community.

The organization observes such forms of actions that will help in ensuring faster and more equitable access to the existing and new COVID-19 health products.

Key elements of C-TAP initiative:

- Public disclosure of gene sequence and data.
- Transparency must be maintained around the publication of all clinical trial results.
- Governments and other funders have been encouraged to include clauses in the funding agreements with the innovators and pharmaceutical companies about the affordability, equal distribution, and the publication of trial data.
- Licensing of any potential treatment, vaccine, diagnostic, or other health technology will be to the Medicines Patent Pool which is an UN-backed public health body.

Countries who have signed up the initiative:

- Argentina
- Barbados
- Bangladesh
- Belize
- Belgium
- Bhutan
- Brazil
- Costa Rica
- Chile
- Dominican Republic
- El Salvador
- Ecuador
- Egypt
- Honduras

- Indonesia
- Lebanon
- Luxembourg
- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Maldives
- Mongolia
- Mozambique
- Norway
- Oman
- Pakistan
- Panama
- Palau
- Peru
- Portugal
- Saint Vincent and Grenadines
- Sudan
- South Africa
- The Netherlands
- Timor Leste
- Uruguay
- Zimbabwe

ICMR approves antigen- based testing kit for faster diagnosis



Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has recommended the use of the first antigen-based testing kit for the faster diagnosis of COVID-19. The kit will facilitate diagnosis at lower rates and without the laboratory examinations of samples.

The antigen test has been developed by a private biotechnology firm named SD Biosensor.

Apart from ICMR, the test has been validated by AIIMS, Delhi. The test can detect the presence of SARS CoV2 in the swab collected from the nose.

In an advisory, ICMR recommended the use of antigen tests in combination with the gold standard RT-PCR Test. While no confirmatory tests have been required for samples testing positive, ICMR mentioned that those who tested negative must undergo RT-PCR test to rule out infection.

What the antigen test will do?

The test will be able to detect the presence of molecules of the pathogens that trigger an immune response in COVID-19 infected persons. The maximum time for diagnosing a positive or a negative result is 30 minutes through an antigen-based kit.

The test will be significant as the use of antigen kits will boost testing because of its turnaround time and pricing. Officials have mentioned that the test is going to be cheaper as compared to RT-PCR kits. Currently, around 1.5 lakh RT-PCR tests have been conducted in the country every day.

ICMR approves antigen-based testing kit:

In the light of rising demand for testing, ICMR has also asked the manufacturers to come forward for validation, who have antigen detection assays.

The agency mentioned that the testing kits will be used for all the symptomatic people with influenza-like illness (ILI) in hotspots or containment zones and asymptomatic and high-risk contacts with co-morbidities of confirmed cases.

In the hospitals, the kit will be used for the symptomatic ILI patients as well as asymptomatic patients who have been hospitalized or seeking hospitalization for chemotherapy and the transplants or those who are over 65 years of age with co-morbidities.

US FDA approves antigen-based test:

In May 2020, the US Food and Drug Administration had also approved an antigen-based test, mentioning that it is a new type of diagnostic test.

The agency had informed that each category of the diagnostic test has its own unique role in fighting the virus. PCR tests have been incredibly accurate but running tests and analysing the result takes time. One of the major benefits of an antigen-based test is its speed which will provide results in minutes.

US FDA also mentioned that the antigen test may not be able to detect all the active infections and the test is not as sensitive as the molecular PCR tests. It means that positive results are highly accurate but there is also a chance of false negatives. So it must be understood that negative results do not rule out infection and must be confirmed with PCR tests.

Scientists observe Bose-Einstein Quantum “Fifth State of Matter” for the first time in space

The fifth state of matter has been observed by the scientists for the first time in space. This observation has offered unprecedented insight that can help in solving some of the quantum universe’s most difficult questions.

A team of NASA Scientists on June 11 unveiled the first results from Bose-Einstein condensates (BEC) experiments aboard the International Space Station, where particles are free from manipulation from any of the Earthly constraints.



The existence of Bose-Einstein condensates (BEC) was predicted by an Indian mathematician Satyendra Nath Bose and Albert Einstein almost a century ago.

Bose-Einstein Condensates:

Bose-Einstein condensates (BEC) are formed when the atoms of certain elements are cooled to near absolute zero (0 Kelvin, minus 273.15 celsius). At this point, atoms become a single entity with quantum property, whereas each particle also functions as a wave of matter.

BECs straddle the line between the macroscopic world that is governed by forces such as gravity and the microscopic place, ruled by quantum mechanics. Scientists have believed that BECs contain vital clues to mysterious phenomena such as dark energy which is unknown energy thought to be behind the Universe’s accelerating expansion.

But BECs are extremely fragile and the slightest interaction with the external world is enough to warm them past their condensation threshold. Because of this condition, it becomes nearly impossible for scientists to study BECs on Earth as gravity interferes with the magnetic field required to hold them in place for observation.

The execution of BECs experiment:

As the scientists unveiled the first results from BEC experiment aboard International Space Station, where particles can be manipulated free from Earthly constraints, Robert Thompson from California Institute for Technology, Pasadena informs that microgravity allows confining atoms with much weaker forces, since we don't have to force them against gravity.

The research that has been published in the Journal Nature presents several startling differences in the properties of BECs created on Earth and those created on aboard the ISS.

BECs in terrestrial lab generally last a handful of milliseconds before dissipating while aboard ISS, the BECs lasted more than a second which offered a team an unprecedented chance to study their properties.

Microgravity had also allowed the atoms to be manipulated by weaker magnetic fields, allowing clearer imaging and speeding their cooling.

A breakthrough of 'Fifth State of Matter':

Creating a fifth state of matter within the physical confines of a space station is no easy task. First bosons, the atoms that have an equal number of protons and electrons, are cooled to absolute zero with the use of lasers to clamp them in space. The more slower the atoms move around, the more cooler they become.

As the atoms lose heat, the magnetic field is introduced to keep them from moving and each particle's waves expand. Cramming plenty of bosons into a microscopic 'trap' causes their waves to overlap into a single matter-wave, this property is known as quantum degeneracy.

The magnetic trap is released for the scientists to study the condensate. However, the atoms begin to repel each other which causes the cloud to fly apart and BEC becomes dilute to detect.

Thomson and the team had realized that the microgravity aboard ISS has allowed them to create BECs from rubidium on a far shallower trap than on Earth. This gave the vastly increased time to study the condensate before diffusing.

Thompson stated that what's important is that we can observe the atoms as they float entirely unconfined by external forces.

Previous studies that had tried to emulate the effect of weightlessness on BECs had used rockets, aeroplanes in free fall, and even apparatus dropped from various heights.

David Aveline, research team leader stated that studying BECs in microgravity has opened up a host of opportunities. Applications range from gravitational waves to spacecraft navigation and searches for dark energy and tests of general relativity and prospecting for subsurface minerals on the moon and other planetary bodies.

Health Minister launches India's first mobile laboratory for COVID-19 testing



The Union Health Minister Harsh Vardhan on June 17 launched India's first mobile laboratory for the testing of COVID-19 in rural and inaccessible areas of India.

Promoting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', Andhra Pradesh Med-Tech Zone and Ministry of Science and Technology had collaborated for this project to address the shortage of healthcare technologies in India.

Andhra Pradesh Med-Tech Zone (AMTZ) is Asia's first medical equipment manufacturing ecosystem that is uniquely dedicated to medical technologies and has been supported by various Ministries of India.

Mobile Laboratory Lab: Key Highlights

- The mobile lab which is also called Infectious Disease Diagnostic Lab or I-Lab will be able to run 25 RT-PCR and about 300 ELISA tests in a day. The lab can also take additional tests for TB, HIV as per CGHS rates.
- A double set of machines will help in increasing the capacity to about 500 tests per day in 8 hours shift.
- The Department of Biotechnology which is under the Ministry of Science along with AMTZ has initiated DBT-AMTZ COMManD (COVID-19 Medtech manufacturing development) consortia. It will address the shortage of critical healthcare technologies in India and will promote self-sufficiency. The lab is the outcome of this initiative.
- Renu Swarup, DBT Secretary stated that through the concerted efforts of Indian scientists, India has achieved a capacity of producing over 5 lakh testing kits per day, which exceeds the target of having one-lakh test kits by May 31.
- The mobile laboratory lab has been created in the record time of 8 days by AMTZ with the support of DBT.

Union Health Minister during the launch of Mobile lab:

Dr. Harsh Vardhan launched India's first mobile laboratory lab and mentioned that the facility will be deployed through DBT testing hubs to the remote regions of the country for COVID-19 testing. There are now over 20 hubs in India with 100 testing laboratories and they have tested more than 2,60,000 samples.

He added that we started the fight against COVID-19 with one laboratory in February 2020 but today we have 953 laboratories across the country. Out of which around 699 are government labs.

The Union Minister on the occasion stated that with the cooperative and collective efforts, India will definitely achieve self-sufficiency in healthcare technologies that will lead towards Atmanirbhar Bharat.

CSIR gets approval for Phase III trial of antiviral drug Umifenovir

The Union Health Minister, Dr. Harsh Vardhan on June 19 informed that CSIR-Central Drug Research Institute (CDRI) has received approval for carrying out phase III trial of antiviral drug Umifenovir. CDRI is the constituent lab of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The Union Minister informed that the clinical trials will be carried out at King George's Medical University (KGMU), ERA's Lucknow Medical College and Hospital, Lucknow, and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences (RMLIMS).

Dr. Harsh Vardhan also informed that the drug will be helpful for COVID-19 treatment as it prevents the virus from entering the human cells and also acts by priming the immune system.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan on the trial of Umifenovir:

The Union Minister mentioned that the CSIR constituent lab has received approval for carrying out phase III Double-blind, randomised, Placebo-controlled trial of efficacy, safety, and tolerability of antiviral drug Umifenovir.

The minister also informed that the drug has a good safety profile and it acts by preventing entry of the virus in human cells as well as by priming the immune system. Umifenovir drug is mainly used for the treatment of influenza. It also recently came into prominence due to its potential use for treating COVID-19 patients.



Govt launched India's National Artificial Intelligence Portal



Ravi Shankar Prasad, the Union Minister of IT, electronics; communications, and law and justice launched a dedicated portal for Artificial Intelligence (AI) on May 30, 2020. The day marked the first anniversary of the second tenure of the central government.

The portal aims to aid the development of solutions based on Artificial Intelligence (AI). It will act as a one-stop digital platform for AI-related developments in India, investment funds in AI, sharing resource details of startups, companies, and educational institutions related to AI in India.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT and IT Industry body NASSCOM has jointly developed India's national Artificial Intelligence Portal called www.ai.gov.in.

Ravi Shankar Prasad on Artificial Intelligence (AI):

The Union minister during the launch of the portal mentioned that India must be a leading country in the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the world, leveraging upon the data it is creating and vast internet-savvy population. India's approach towards AI should be of empowerment of human beings and inclusion by supplementing growth and development rather than making human beings less relevant.

'Responsible AI for Youth' Programme launched by the government:

The central government has also launched a national programme for youth named 'Responsible AI for Youth'. It aims at empowering the young students of the country with an appropriate new-age tech mindset, access to required AI toolset and relevant AI skill sets to make the youth digitally ready for the future.

National-e Governance Division, Ministry of Electronics and IT in collaboration with Intel India created and launched the programme, with support from the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSE&L), Ministry of Human Resource Development.

Objective of 'Responsible AI for Youth' Programme:

The program will empower the youth to become AI-ready and will help in reducing the skill gap while enabling the youth to create meaningful social impact solutions.

The Programme has been designed to reach out to students from government schools pan India and also to provide them with an opportunity to become part of the skilled workforce in an inclusive manner.

Who can be a part of the program?

The program has been open to the students of classes 8-12 from central and state-run government schools. In its first phase, each of the State-education departments will be nominating 10 teachers who identify 25-50 potential students for the program.

The selected students will attend the online training sessions on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and will also understand how to identify social impact ideas/projects that can be created using AI. The students will be able to submit their ideas through a 60-second video explaining a proposed AI-enabled solution.

Opportunity to the selected students:

From the ideas submitted by the students in the form of videos, the top 100 videos will be shortlisted and they will be invited to attend residential boot camps or online sessions which will take them through a deep dive AI journey. After the boot camps/online sessions, the students will be asked to create real-time projects. They will need to submit their final project in a video format on a website.

Intel certified AI coaches and mentors will provide adequate handling throughout. It will ensure that ideas mature as prototypes. The experts will also shortlist the top 50 project ideas and selected students will also be invited to show their projects either face to face or in an online format.

Further, the top 20 innovative projects will be selected by an independent committee of experts that will provide opportunities to showcase at relevant platforms.

CDCSO permits Remdesivir for restricted emergency use on hospitalised COVID-19 patients



The Central Drug Control Standard Organisation (CDCSO), India's top drug controller has permitted Gilead Sciences for marketing authorization of its anti-viral drug 'Remdesivir'.

As per a senior government official, the decision was pushed due to the COVID-19 outbreak in the country. The drug has been permitted for the restricted emergency use on hospitalised COVID-19 patients only.

The official also informed that the anti-viral drug will be available in the form of an injection and will be sold on retail on doctor prescription for hospital use. As per Gilead Sciences, the drug benefits in the treatment of COVID-19.

CDSCO on permitting Remdesivir:

After the consultation with an expert committee, CDSCO granted the Remdesivir drug to be given in emergencies in laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 patients in India.

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) had also issued an emergency use authorization for the investigational anti-viral drug Remdesivir for treating the laboratory-confirmed or suspected COVID-19 in adults or children hospitalized with severe disease.

The government official while informing that all new drugs have to undergo clinical trials to get approval for marketing in India also mentioned that the drug regulator has approved Remdesivir under Special Provisions of the New Drug and Clinical Trials Rules 2019. It provides a waiver of clinical trials in special circumstances.

The drug regulator body had also received three applications from three Indian pharmaceutical companies- Hetero labs, Cipla, and BDR Pharmaceuticals to manufacture and sell the anti-viral drug in India.

Demand for Remdesivir by other agencies:

Gilead Sciences had earlier informed that they have entered into non-exclusive licensing agreements with pharmaceutical firms which also includes three domestic majors- Jubilant Life Sciences, Cipla, and Hetero for the manufacture and distribution of the anitoviral drug.

India's apex medical research body- Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) had also mentioned that Remdesivir had also been used during the Ebola outbreak and there are chances that it might slow down the COVID-19 replication.

As per an article published in the New England Journal of Medicine informed that the two out of three critically-ill COVID-19 patients had shown sign of improvements when they were administered with Remdesivir drug by the doctors.

Centre initiates consultation process for new science, technology and innovation policy



The central government has initiated a consultation process for the formulation of new science, technology, and innovation policy (STIP 2020). As per the statement, a decentralized, inclusive, and bottom-up process has been jointly initiated by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and The Office to the Principal Scientific Advisor to GOI.

The fifth S&T policy is being formulated at a time when India and the world are tackling and trying to find ways to combat COVID-19 Pandemic. The consultation processes on different tracks have already been started by the government and have been running in parallel.

The process will be of six-months which will involve the consultations with all the stakeholders from within and beyond the scientific ecosystem, including

industry, academia, government, global partners, civic bodies, young scientists and technologists, and the general public.

Statement declaring the consultation process:

The statement which was issued on June 2 mentioned that as the crisis changes the world, the new policy along with its decentralized manner of the formulation will reorient STI in terms of sectoral focus, priorities, the way research is done and the technologies have been developed and deployed for the larger socio-economic welfare.

As per the Secretary of DST, Ashutosh Sharma, the STI policy for new India will integrate the lessons learned from COVID-19, including building 'Atmanirbhar Bharat through ST & I (Science, Technology, and Innovation), designs, by leveraging our strengths in R & D (Research and Development), huge markets, diversity and data, demographic dividend, S&T workforce, and institutions.

Formulation Process of STIP 2020 in four highly interlinked tracks:

The sessions of these four tracks have been attended by around 130 members of the 21 thematic groups along with scientists of DST, the office of PSA, and 25 policy research fellows. The formulation process of the four tracks are:

- **Track I-** It will involve an extensive expert and public consultation process through Science Policy Forum- a dedicated platform created for soliciting inputs from larger public and expert pool during and after the policy drafting process.
- **Track II-** It will comprise experts driven thematic consultations in order to feed evidence formed recommendations into the policy of drafting processes. Till now, twenty -one focused thematic groups have been constituted for the purpose. The thematic group (TG) consultation started with a series of information sessions last week. During the sessions, the head of Policy Coordination and Programme Monitoring Division of DST, Akhilesh Gupta made the presentation and steered the discussions.
- **Track III-** It involves consultation with the states and ministries. Nodal officers have also been nominated in ministries and in states, agencies,

and departments of Government of India for the extensive intra-department and intra-state consultation.

- **Track IV-** This track constitutes apex level multi-stakeholder consultation. At this consultation with global partners, industry bodies and inter-state and inter-ministerial consultations at the highest level have been carried out.

NSDC partners with TCS to promote skill development

National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has partnered with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) to provide its training partners access to the TCS iON Digital Glass Room.

The digital platform will enable NSDC in moving classroom vocational skills training to online mode for millions of students across the country. Over 500 training partners of NSDC network across the country will be able to access the TCS iON Digital Glass Room.



As per the statement released by TCS, the students and the trainers will be able to share posts, vote, like, and can chat with each other, ensuring a seamless education.

Significance of the new partnership:

The new partnership between NSDC and TCS will help in strengthening NSDC's online aggregation platform eSkill India. Through this, NSDC enables e-learning among skill seekers as well as contributes towards strengthening the Skill India Mission.

TCS released a statement in which it mentioned that NSDC's network of over 500 training partners can access the TCS iON Digital Glass Room. It will help in the transition to the virtual teaching and learning environment and will also be able to continue their skilling programmes at the time of lockdown and thereafter.

Managing Director and CEO of NSDC, Manish Kumar stated that in today's disruptive environment, digital solutions are able to provide self-study courses and live virtual classrooms that enable the continuity of training and learning. He further added that NSDC's collaboration with TCS iON aims at facilitating innovative methods in order to promote skill training and access for learners.

What will be different in this new platform?

TCS iON platform will enable the trainers to create and share content, deliver lectures, conduct formative tests, share and evaluate assignments, and monitor learner's progress.

The platform will also enable online collaboration among trainers and students through quizzes, debates, surveys, and polls.

About NSDC:

National Skill Development Corporation is not for profit public limited company. It was incorporated on July 31, 2008. The company was set up by the Ministry of Finance as a Public-Private Partnership Model. The Indian government through the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship holds 49% of the share capital of NSDC. The private sector has the remaining balance of 51% of the share capital.

It aims at promoting skill development by catalyzing the creation of quality, large and for-profit vocational institutions. The organisation also provides funding to build profitable and scalable vocational training initiatives.

NSDC also acts as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to companies, enterprises, and organizations that provide skill training.

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Corporate

Saudi Arabia's PIF to invest Rs. 11,367 crore in Jio Platforms

Jio Platforms and Reliance Industries on June 18 announced an investment of Rs. 11,367 crore by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund. The announced investment now values Jio Platforms at an enterprise value of Rs. 5.16 lakh crore and an equity value of Rs. 4.91 lakh crore.

Saudi Arabia's PIF investment will translate into a 2.32% equity stake in Jio Platforms on a fully diluted basis. This is the eleventh investment in Jio Platforms within the time of nine weeks since April 22, 2020.

With Saudi Arabia's investment, Jio Platforms has raised Rs. 1,15,693.95 crore from the leading global investors that include Silver Lake, Facebook, General Atlantic, Vista Equity Partners, KKR, Mubadala, ADIA, L Catterton, and TPG.

Reliance Industries on the investment:

A release of Reliance Industries mentioned that with the addition of the PIF's investment, Jio Platforms has been establishing partnerships with a marquee set of global financial investors, who will be contributing to the establishment of the digital society vision of India.

Chairman and Managing Director of Reliance Industries, Mukesh Ambani welcomed Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund as a valued partner in Jio Platforms. He mentioned that Reliance has enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for many decades. From the Oil economy, this relationship has now been moving to strengthen India's New Oil (data-driven) economy, which is evident from the announced investment of PIF in Jio Platforms.

Mr. Ambani added that he had greatly admired the defining role that PIF has played in the economic transformation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He welcomed PIF as a valued partner in Jio Platforms and is looking forward to their sustained support as they both take ambitious steps to accelerate India's digital transformation for empowering and enriching the lives of 1.3 billion Indians.

RIL release further mentioned that the new investment reaffirms Jio's continuing attraction among global investors for being the best representative of deep understanding of the Indian market, India's digital potential, capabilities to bring cutting-edge technologies and tools, and rapid digitisation opportunity post COVID.

At the investment of Rs. 1,15,693.95 crore, it is the largest continuous fund that is raised by a company anywhere in the world amid global lockdown.

The transaction has been subjected to Indian regulatory and other customary approvals. Morgan Stanley has acted as a financial advisor to the Reliance Industries and Davis Polk and Wardwell and AZB and Partners have acted as legal counsels.

Saudi Arabia's PIF on the investment in Jip Platforms:

PIF's governor, Yasif Al-Rumayyan while commenting on the investment stated that the potential of the Indian digital economy is very exciting. He expresses his delight at an investment in an innovative business which is the symbol of the transformation of the technology sector in India.

He mentioned that the investment will enable them to generate significant long term commercial return's for the benefit of Saudi Arabia's economy, in line with the mandate which is to safeguard and grow the wealth of the Kingdom.

About Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund:

It is the sovereign wealth fund of Saudi Arabia. As a part of its mandate to diversify the kingdoms' economy, it has made the largest investment into an Indian Economy till date.

It is among the largest sovereign wealth funds in the world which has total estimated assets of nearly \$400 billion. The latest investment is in line with PIF's strategy of investing in companies and sectors that will generate longo-term commercial returns to drive Saudi Arabia's economic transformation which is part of Vision 2030 objectives.

Jio-Mubadala deal for 1.85% Stake in Jio Platforms: All you need to know



Abu Dhabi-based firm, Mubadala Investment Company has recently invested into Reliance Jio Platforms to acquire 1.85 percent stake in the company. Under this deal, Mubadala will be investing Rs 9,093.60 crore into Jio Platforms., the telecom branch of Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries Limited (RIL).

The Jio-Mubadala deal awaits regulatory and customary approvals. It is the sixth such deal in last 1.5 months. The other five deals were carried out with Facebook, Silver Lake, General Atlantic, Vista Equity Partners and KKR.

Key Takeaways from Mubadala-Reliance Jio deal

- To carry out this deal, Reliance Industries hired the Morgan Stanley as financial advisor and took legal counsel of AZB & Partners and Davis Polk & Wardwell.
- With this deal and previous five ones, Reliance Jio receives a total investment of Rs 87,655.35 crore.
- The deal now values Jio Platforms at Rs 4.91 lakh crore in terms of equity and Rs 5.16 lakh crore in enterprise value.

How stake sale will be beneficial for Reliance Industries?

The stake sales will enable the Reliance Industries in achieving its zero-net debt by March 2021. In March 2020, RIL had Rs 3.36 lakh crore outstanding debt and Rs 1.75 lakh crore cash in hand, leading to its net debt of Rs 1.61 lakh crore.

About Mubadala Investment Company

- Mubadala Investment Company was established in 2017 as an investment firm for Abu Dhabi and has now its presence worldwide across various sectors. It has made investments in over 50 countries.
- The Abu Dhabi company has a wide portfolio that includes manufacturing, metals & mining, semiconductors, pharmaceutical & medical technology, and so much more.
- Headquartered in Abu Dhabi, Mubadala has offices Moscow, Rio de Janeiro, New York and San Francisco.
- It is the 2nd largest state investor after the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority.\

Highlights of Six Investment deals in Jio Platforms

Company	Stake	Investment Value
Facebook	9.99% stake	Rs 43574 crore
General Atlantic	1.34% stake	Rs 6,598.38 crore
Vista Equity Partners	2.32% stake	Rs 11,367 crore
Silver Lake	1.15% stake	Rs 5,655.75 crore
KKR	2.32% stake	Rs 11,367 crore
Mubadala	1.85% stake	Rs 9,093.60 crore

Jio-ADIA Deal: Abu Dhabi Investment Authority buys 1.16% Stake In Reliance Jio Platforms; Check Details



Reliance Jio has entered into another investment deal with Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA). The UAE-based ADIA has bagged 1.16% stake in Jio platforms through an investment of Rs 5,683.50 crore. The deal comes just three days after Abu Dhabi based Mubadala Investment Company took 1.85% stake in Jio platforms.

Morgan Stanley provided the financial advice to Reliance Industries to carry it this deal with ADIA and AZB & Partners and Davis Polk & Wardwell provided the legal counsel. ADIA is the seventh investor to bag equity stake in Reliance Jio in last seven weeks.

This ADIA investment takes Jio Platform's total fundraise to Rs 97,885.65 crore after the investment from investors like Facebook, General Atlantic, Silver Lake, Vista Equity Partners, KKR and Mubadala. ADIA has earlier invested in various Indian companies including LIC Housing, ICICI Bank, Jindal Stainless, Escorts LT, and Infosys.

The investment places Jio Platforms at an equity value of Rs 4.91 lakh crore and Rs 5.16 lakh crore enterprise value.

Objective behind Jio's Fundraise

Reliance Jio has raise Rs 97,885.65 crore from stake sales and Rs 53,124 crore from rights issue so far. The fundraise will help Reliance consolidate its net debt. In March 2020, Reliance's net debt stood at Rs 1.61 lakh crore. Mukesh Ambani-led Reliance Industries has targeted to achieve zero net-debt by March 2021.

Other potential investors

As per media sources, various other investors are expected to join this fundraising spree and invest in Jio platforms including the Microsoft and Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF).

Mukesh Ambani joins club of world's top 10 richest people



Mukesh Ambani with a recent soar in net worth has jumped into the exclusive club of the **world's top 10 richest people**, as per Forbes Real-Time Billionaire list.

The Reliance Industries Chairman and Managing Director with a net worth of USD 64.5 billion is currently **ranked 9th on the list of World's top billionaires**. His net worth has increased by almost 12 times from USD 5.3 billion to USD 64.6 billion within just two months.

Ambani's rise in the billionaires' list comes as the world and India together head for one of its worst recession. Ambani owns 42% of Reliance Industries Ltd and the company recently declared itself net-debt free, following a rapid flow of investments into Reliance's digital platform- Jio.

Reliance becomes net debt-free

Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) declared itself net-debt free on June 19, 2020 after it raised around ₹168,818.15 from 11 investment deals in Jio Platforms, which amounted to around Rs 115,693.95 crore and the recent RIL right issue, which raised Rs 53,124.20 crore. RIL became net debt-free almost eight months ahead of its March 2021 deadline.

Reliance Industries had stated that it had a net debt of about Rs 161,035 crore as on March 31, 2020. The company had set a target of becoming net debt-free within the next 18 months, by March 31, 2021.

Reliance Jio Investors

S No	Investor	Investment Amount (in crores)	Stake Bought
1	Facebook, Inc.	Rs 43,573.62	9.99%
2	Silver Lake Partners	Rs 5,655.75	1.15%
3	Vista Equity Partners	Rs 11,367.00	2.32%
4	General Atlantic	Rs 6,598.38	1.34%
5	KKR	Rs 11,367.00	2.32%
6	Mubadala	Rs 9,093.60	1.85%
7	Silver Lake Partners (additional investment)	Rs 4,546.80	0.93%
8	Abu Dhabi Investment Authority	Rs 5,683.50	1.16%
9	TPG	Rs 4,546.80	0.93%
10	L Catterton	Rs 1,894.50	0.39%
11	PIF	Rs 11,367.00	2.32%
Total		₹ 115,693.95	24.70%

World's Top 10 Richest People

Rank	Name/ Country	Net Worth (In Billions)	Company
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1	Jeff Bezos	USD 160.1	Amazon
2	Bill Gates	USD 108.7	Microsoft
3	Bernard Arnault & family	USD 103.2	LVMH
4	Mark Zuckerberg	USD 87.9	Facebook
5	Warren Buffet	USD 71.4	Berkshire Hathaway
6	Steve Ballmer	USD 68.9	Microsoft
7	Larry Ellison	USD 68.9	Oracle
8	Amancio Ortega	USD 65.8	Zara
9	Mukesh Ambani	USD 64.6	Reliance Industries
10	Larry Page	USD 64.3	Google
Rank/ Net worth as of June 20, 2020			

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Sports

Rohit Sharma nominated for Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award 2020



Rohit Sharma has been nominated by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) for the prestigious Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award 2020. Among other nominations, the BCCI nominated Shikhar Dhawan, Deepti Sharma and Ishant Sharma for Arjuna Awards.

The Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports had sought invitations for the awards from the

board. The period of consideration for the nominations is from January 1, 2016–December 31, 2019.

Speaking on the nominations, BCCI President Sourav Ganguly stated that they went through a lot of data and considered various parameters before shortlisting the nominees. He said that Rohit Sharma has set new benchmarks as a batsman and achieved scores that people thought were not possible in the shorter formats of the game so he is worthy of the honour for his consistency, conduct, commitment and leadership skills.

Rohit Sharma

Rohit Sharma is India's vice-captain in the limited-overs format. He was named ICC ODI Cricketer of the Year 2019. He holds the record of becoming the first-ever cricketer to score five centuries in a single World Cup edition, with his fabulous performance in the ICC ODI World Cup 2019. He is also the first batsman to score four T20I centuries and the first-ever player to score twin centuries in his maiden appearance as a Test opener.

Shikhar Dhawan

Shikhar Dhawan is the only batsman in the world to win two consecutive golden bats for most runs in the ICC Champions Trophy. He holds the record of scoring the

fastest Test century on debut. He is also the fastest Indian batsman to reach 2000 and 3000 runs in ODIs and second-fastest Indian to reach 4000 and 5000 ODI runs.

Ishant Sharma

Ishant Sharma is the youngest Indian cricketer to play in all three formats of the game. He holds the record of most wickets by an Indian fast bowler outside Asia. He leads India's pace attack.

Deepti Sharma

All-rounder Deepti Sharma holds the record of the highest individual ODI score by an Indian woman cricketer. She is also the only Indian spinner to take 6 ODI wickets in women's cricket.

BAI recommends Kidambi Srikanth for Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award after his apology



The Badminton Association of India (BAI) on June 19, 2020 recommended Kidambi Srikanth for the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award after he gave his apology to the federation for his misconduct during the Asian Championship earlier in 2020.

On the other hand, HS Prannoy has been issued a notice by BAI, giving him 15 days to respond to his misconduct. The BAI's statement read that both Srikanth and Prannoy had left the squad at Asian Badminton Championship in Manila in February, despite advice not to leave, which put India's chances of winning the historic medal at the championship in jeopardy.

India lost in the semi-finals against Indonesia and this led BAI not to recommend either of them on disciplinary grounds for this year's National Sports

Awards. However, the former world number 1 has submitted an unconditional apology.

The Badminton Association stated that they received an email from Kidambi Srikanth in which he has accepted the mistake and promised not to indulge in such activities in the future. The BAI General Secretary Ajay Singhania stated that considering the talent of Srikanth and his accomplishments, they have decided to recommend his name for Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award.

HS Prannoy had hit out at the BAI earlier this, questioning the selection criteria for the Arjuna Award. The shuttler criticised that the players who have won nothing have been recommended, while the players who have medals to their credit have been snubbed.

His remarks came after BAI recommended the doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty and men's singles player Sameer Verma for the Arjuna Award.

BAI issues notice to HS Prannoy

HS Prannoy has been issued a notice to respond in 15 days on his misconduct. The shuttler had slammed BAI, fellow players and went on to say that 'country is a joke' on social media and in media interviews.

The BAI General Secretary said that there have been several instances of disciplinary issues with Prannoy and the federation has been very tolerant all this while but in the recent past his attitude has forced the association to take action and also relook at the disciplinary policies.

Singhania said that a show-cause letter has been issued to the shuttler for the remarks he made and stated that If the player fails to respond in the allotted time, the BAI will be taking stern action against the shuttler.

Background

The Badminton Association of India is formulating a code of conduct for its players, coaches and technical officials which has to be abided strictly.

Boxing Federation nominates Amit Panghal, Vikas Krishnan for Khel Ratna Award



Boxing Federation of India (BFI) has nominated world silver- medallist Amit Panghal and seasoned Vikas Krishnan for Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award. The federation picked only Olympic bound names as its nominees for the annual honours.

The Federation has also nominated world bronze-winning trio of Simranjit Kaur (64 kg), Lovlina Borgohain (69 kg), and Manish Kaushik (63 kg) for Arjuna Awards. Borgohain has won world bronze twice, which has been the most recent in last year.

As per the official from the Boxing Federation of India, the nominations of the athletes and coaches have been made on the basis of their performance in the last four years. Former world-medallist N Usha has also been nominated for Dhyan Chand Award for Lifetime Contribution to Sports.

BFI shared the names of the nominees for the Khel Ratna and Arjuna Award on their official twitter handle as well.

Nomination of Amit Panghal for Khel Ratna:

The 24-year-old Amit Panghal (52 kg) is also an Asian Games Champion but has not won any National Sports Award. He was being nominated for Arjuna Award for the past 3 years but the selection committee had not considered him because of 2012 'inadvertent' dope offence.

BFI Executive Director R K Sacheti mentioned that he has been allowed to compete for the country and his medals are celebrated, he deserves to be honoured as well. BFI had last vowed to keep nominating him until his name was considered.

The doping violation first took place when Panghal was undergoing treatment for Chicken Pox in his Youth Category Days. In a recent interaction, Panghal had clarified that he didn't do it intentionally and only took a medicine that was prescribed to him without knowing the consequences. He further added mistakes at

the youth level are forgiven everywhere and he hopes that he will be considered for the prestigious award.

Amit Panghal had also written to Sports Minister, Kiran Rijju. He demanded a change in the selection procedure of the award and called for an end to self-nomination and the process of having a committee picking the winners.

Nomination of Vikas Krishan for Khel Ratna:

Vikas Krishan (69 kg) has been a Commonwealth and Asian Games Gold Medallist. He had won Arjuna Award in 2012. The 28-year-old athlete had turned professional in 2018 after his CWG top finish followed by a third Asian Games Medal—a Bronze.

Krishan returned to the amateur circuit in 2019 with the South Asian Games where he won a gold medal before qualifying for the Olympics at the Asian qualifiers in Jordan in March 2020.

Nominations for Arjuna Award:

Out of the three Arjuna Award nominees, Manish Kaushik had a great run for the past couple of years. He won a bronze in his maiden world championship (2019) to qualify for the Olympics after he won a Silver at the Commonwealth Games 2018.

While both the other nominees, Simranjit Kaur and Lovlina Borgohain have booked their Tokyo tickets at the Asian qualifiers.

Coaches Nominated for Dronacharya Award:

BFI has finalized the names of national women's coach Mohammed Ali Qamar and assistant coach Chhote Lal Yadav for the Dronacharya Award.

Qamar has been an Arjuna Awardee and was India's first Commonwealth Games gold-medallist in boxing. Qamar has been in-charge of the women's camp for over a year now and this was after serving as an assistant coach for one year.

While Chhote Lal Yadav has been closely associated with six-time world champion M C Mary Kom. She has credited him for keeping her focused in the past couple of years.

Nominees for the awards:

- **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award:** Vikas Krishan and Amit Panghal
- **Dronacharya Award:** Chhote Lal Yadav and Mohammed Ali Qamar
- **Arjuna Award:** Simranjit Kaur, Manish Kaushik, and Lovlina Borgohain
- **Dhyan Chand Award:** N Usha

Sports Ministry launches Khelo India Community Coach Development Programme



The Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, Kiren Rijiju has inaugurated 25-day Khelo India Community Coach Development Programme for Community Coaches and 15,000 PE Teachers across India. The Programme has been launched by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.

Kiren Rijiju defined the programme as a critical and far-reaching initiative that will boost India's hopes of becoming a powerful force in the field of sports. He also appreciated the rising level of fitness among the people in India and heaped praise on Fit India Movement.

The guest speakers during the inaugural session were Professor Darlene Kulka, Vice-President of the International Council of Sports Science and Physical Education, and Professor Rosa Lopez De'Amico, President of the International Association of Physical Education and Sports for Women.

Launch of Khelo India Community Coach Development Programme:

The Youth Affairs and Sports Minister, Kiren Rijiju during the inauguration of the programme stated that earlier physical education at school used to be an ad-hoc arrangement and was never given much importance. But if India desires to be a sporting superpower, we will need to create a culture of sports in the country.

He further added that PE teachers and community coaches play a big role in reaching every child in every corner of the country as well as motivating them to take

up fitness and sports as part of their daily life. If the culture of sports will be developed, champions will emerge automatically.

He informed that the Ministry of sports will work closely with the HRD Ministry and the programme will be taken to every school in India, as fitness must be a part of daily life and not something optional.

While talking about the Fit India movement, Kiren Rijiju mentioned that the way Prime Minister Narendra Modi had envisioned the Fit India Movement, it has certainly created an impact on the citizens. Everyone knew that fitness is important but with the help of movement, people have been encouraged to take up fitness as a way of life.

The speakers present during the launch of the programme also talked about the importance of not only making physical education classes in school better but also making PE teachers well-trained for the job so as to ensure that there is maximum output from the children they are training.

Course module of the programme:

The course module of the Khelo India Community Coach Development Programme launched by the Sports Ministry will equip the community coaches and PE Teachers with the right set of knowledge and skills. It will help children of all ages to take on a variety of fitness-related activities and to conduct age-appropriate fitness tests.

The participants of the programme will also be exposed to an exclusive session by an international expert every day beside the regular sessions to be conducted by eminent educationists in the field of fitness and physical education.

ICC approves interim regulation changes: Ban imposed on use of saliva to shine balls



The International Cricket Council (ICC) has approved interim changes to its playing regulations, which includes a ban on the use of saliva to shine the ball.

The ICC Chief Executives' Committee (CEC) ratified the recommendations from the Anil Kumble-led Cricket Committee, which were aimed at lessening the risks posed by coronavirus pandemic and protect the health of players and match officials

when cricket resumes.

Following interim changes have been approved:

Player Replacements: The teams will be allowed to replace players displaying symptoms of COVID-19 during a Test match. The Match Referee will approve the nearest like-for-like replacement in line with concussion replacements. This regulation for COVID-19 replacements will not be applicable in ODIs and T20Is.

Ban on use of saliva: The players will no longer be allowed to use saliva to shine the ball. However, if a player does apply saliva to the ball, the umpires will handle the situation initially with some leniency to allow the players to adjust to the new regulations. However, subsequent instances will result in the team receiving a warning.

Penalty

A team will be issued up to two warnings per innings for using saliva to shine the ball. But repeated violation will result in a 5-run penalty to the batting side.

Precautionary steps

Whenever a bowler accidentally applies saliva to the ball, the umpires will be instructed to clean the ball before play recommences.

Match officials: The ICC has decided to temporarily remove the requirement of appointing neutral match officials from the playing conditions for all international formats due to the current logistical challenges with international travel. The ICC will be appointing locally-based match officials from the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Officials and the Emirates ICC International Panel of Match Officials.

Additional DRS reviews: The ICC CEC has also confirmed the provision of an additional unsuccessful DRS review for each team in each innings of a match, as they may be less experienced umpires on duty at times. This will increase the number of unsuccessful appeals per innings for each team to three for Tests and two for ODIs/T20s. The ICC Cricket Operations team will be supporting the Match Referees while processing the Code of Conduct breaches and a neutral Elite Panel match referee will conduct hearings remotely using a video link.

Logo Rules Relaxation: The ICC Chief Executives' Committee has also approved the relaxation of rules on apparel logos for the next 12 months. The ICC has allowed additional logo, not exceeding 32 square inches in size, to be placed on the chest of the Test match shirt and sweater in addition to the three other logos allowed as per regulations. Till now, logos on chests were only allowed in ODIs and T20Is.

KL Rahul, Jadeja, Pujara issued notice by NADA for failing to disclose their whereabouts



Indian cricketers KL Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja and Cheteshwar Pujara have been issued notices by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) for failing to disclose their whereabouts. Two other Indian women cricketers, Smriti Mandhana and Deepti Sharma also received similar notices.

These five centrally-contracted cricketers are members of the 110 strong National Registered Testing Pool (N RTP). They are bounded by the rule to submit their whereabouts on a quarterly basis, which they failed to do for the past three months. The BCCI cited a glitch in the password as the key reason for the delay.

The BCCI has sent an official explanation for the failure of their five N RTP players' to submit their whereabouts.

National Registered Testing Pool

The athletes at the top level of their sport are generally selected for a Testing Pool. NADA identifies a Registered Testing Pool, which includes athletes who are required to share their whereabouts in line with the requirements of the International Standard for Testing. NADA regularly conducts reviews and updates its criteria for including athletes in its Registered Testing Pool. It also revises the membership of its Registered Testing Pool from time-to-time as it deems appropriate in accordance with the set criteria.

Each Athlete in the Registered Testing Pool is required to:

- Inform NADA of his/ her whereabouts on a quarterly basis, in the manner prescribed in Article 11.3 of the International Standard for Testing.

- Update necessary information in accordance with Article 11.4.2 of the International Standard for Testing, to ensure that it remains accurate and complete at all times.
- Make himself or herself available for testing at such whereabouts, in accordance with Article 11.4 of the International Standard for Testing.

Key Highlights

- The athletes can either fill up their whereabouts forms on the Anti-Doping Administration & Management Systems (ADAMS) software himself/herself or the association can fill it up on his./ her behalf.
- Sometimes the athletes in certain disciplines do not have access to the internet or aren't educated enough to fill their whereabouts clause form and upload it on the system. In such cases, they take the assistance of their concerned federations.
- Hence, the federations have accepted the responsibility of uploading their whereabouts.
- Even in cricket, though the players are well qualified and can fill the form themselves, they don't get the time for various reasons. The BCCI has taken the responsibility to upload their whereabouts.

BCCI's explanation

The BCCI stated that there was a glitch in the password on the ADAMS software, which caused a delay in the submission of the whereabouts of the five players. The issue has now been resolved.

Three such failures of disclosing whereabouts leads to one Anti Doping Rule Violation, which could lead to two years of suspension upon hearing.

NADA DG Navin Agarwal said that BCCI's explanation will be discussed as to whether it will be counted as one of three filing failures or not.

Sports Ministry to establish Khelo India State Centres of Excellence



The Sports Ministry of India is all ready to establish Khelo India State Centres of Excellence under the Khelo India Scheme. It aims at creating a robust sporting ecosystem in the entire country. One such centre will be identified in each States and UTs.

In the first step, the sports ministry has already identified state-owned sports facilities in 8 states of India. These facilities will be upgraded into Khelo India State Centres of Excellence (KISCE).

The state and UTs will be responsible to run the centre and build capacity to run it into a world-class sporting facility. While the funds for expert coaches, equipment, support staff, infrastructure will be extended through the Khelo India Scheme.

Key Highlights:

- The selection process of these sports facilities was started in October 2019. Each State and UT had to identify the best sports infrastructure available which can be developed into a world-class sporting facility. Out of the 15 proposals, 8 were shortlisted.
- To upgrade the existing centre to the KISCE, the government will be extending a 'Viability Gap Funding'. It will bridge the gaps in the requirement of sports equipment, high-performance manager, and expert coaches.
- The eight centres will be provided with a grant based on the actual amount finalized as per the requirement indicated after a comprehensive gap analysis study. States and UTs will have to identify and develop the talent in each sport for which the funding has been received by the centre.

Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports on KISCE:

Speaking about the initiative, the Union Minister Kiren Rijiju mentioned that the Khelo India State Centre of Excellence is being established to strengthen India's pursuit of excellence in the Olympics. The ministry's effort is to scale up the best sporting facilities available in each state of India into a world-class standard where athletes from all over India will train in their specific discipline.

He further mentioned that this is the step in the right direction to acquire talent from across the country and train them into elite athletes who will medals for the country in all the major international tournaments, especially the Olympics.

8 selected state-owned sports facilities which will be upgraded to KISCE:

- Jaiprakash Narayan National Youth Centre, Bangalore, Karnataka
- Sangey Lhaden Sports Academy, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh
- GV Raja Sr. Secondary Sports School in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala
- Khuman Lampak Sports Complex, Imphal, Manipur
- Rajiv Gandhi Stadium in Aizawl, Mizoram
- State Sports Academy, IG Stadium, in Kohima, Nagaland
- Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar, Odisha
- Regional Sports School, Hakimpet, Telangana

Football Federation recommends former captain IM Vijayan for Padma Shri



The All India Football Federation (AIFF) has decided to recommend former Indian captain IM Vijayan for the Padma Shri award, which is the country's fourth-highest civilian award.

The 51-year-old former professional footballer and the striker had scored 40 goals in 79 matches for India. IM Vijayan was awarded the Indian 'Player of the Year' in 1993, 1997, and 1999. He was also honored with Arjuna Award in 2003.

IM Vijayan is one of the most skillful footballers that the country has ever seen. He formed a prolific strike partnership alongside Bhaichung Bhutia which helped the team in scoring various goals in the international tournaments.

IM Vijayan: Key Highlights

- IM Vijayan was part of the victorious Indian football team in the 1999 South Asian Football Federation Cup. He scored one of the fastest international goals in history during the game tournament, where he managed to find the back of the net in just 12 seconds.
- He also finished as a top scorer with four goals in the Afro-Asian Games event that was held in India in 2003. He formally retired from international football after Afro-Asian Games 2003.
- At the club level, some of IM Vijayan's best performances in the early stage of his career came in a Kerala Police Football Club, which was his first team.
- During Quilon Nationals 1987, he gave brilliant performances for Kerala Police and impressed the National Football fraternity with his impeccable skills and highly aggressive style of playing the sport.
- IM Vijayan had also played for Kolkata heavyweights Mohun Bagan and towards the end of his career, he also donned the East Bengal Jersey.
- After football, IM Vijayan started his career in acting and played a lead role in the movie 'Shantham'. He has acted in more than 20 films in both Tamil and Malayalam.

National Sports Awards Nominations:

On June 3, 2020, the Sports Ministry announced that it has decided to extend the deadline for the submission of applications for the National Sports Awards till June 22. The sports ministry had also earlier allowed the sportspersons to file their nomination by self-application.

The decision was taken because of the difficulties faced by them in getting the recommendation from prescribed persons/authorities due to the nationwide lockdown to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indian weightlifter Sanjita Chanu cleared of doping charge by IWF; demands apology and compensation



Indian weightlifter **K Sanjita Chanu** has been cleared of doping charge by the International Weightlifting Federation due to “**non-conformities**” in the handling of her sample. The IWF took the decision based on the recommendation of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

The Commonwealth Games gold-medallist has now demanded an apology and

compensation for the “trauma” she endured due to the doping charges. The 26-year-old had claimed her innocence right from the beginning.

Speaking after being cleared of the charges, K Sanjita Chanu said that she was happy in the sense that she was finally and officially cleared from the doping charges. **“But, what about the chances I have lost? Who will take the responsibility of the mental trauma I have been living with?”** Chanu asked.

She further asked who will take responsibility for the mistakes that have happened at every possible level. “You put an athlete under suspension for years without a final judgment, and one fine day you send an e-mail saying that you are now free from charges?” she added.

IWF's Final Verdict

- Chanu was informed about the final verdict on her doping charges through an email from the International Weightlifting Federation. The IWF email read that WADA has recommended out of fairness to the athlete that the case based on the sample should be closed.
- The mail further stated that IWF was told by WADA on May 28 that there were “certain non-conformities” at the time of the analysis of Chanu’s sample. Due to this, the IWF decided to withdraw the charges against the Athlete based on sample 159 90 00 and close the matter.

- WADA had last month partially suspended the accreditation of a laboratory in Salt Lake City for a month due to “non-conformities” relating to its documents. The same lab had tested Chanu’s sample.

K Sanjita Chanu’s case

- Sanjita Chanu had tested positive for anabolic steroid testosterone before the World Championships in America in November 2017. The test was carried out by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA).
- The laboratory results of the tests were handed over to the International Weightlifting Federation on December 20. The weightlifter was then put under provisional suspension on May 15, 2018. Her ‘B’ sample returned positive on September 2018.
- On October 18, 2019, Chanu’s representatives appeared before a hearing panel of the International Weightlifting Federation in Budapest, Hungary. Her provisional suspension was revoked on January 22, 2019.
- The IWF admitted to having made a mistake in giving the exact sample number of Chanu’s sample in its report. The world body had mistakenly mentioned two different urine sample numbers in its communication of her dope test.

Chanu’s Reaction

The Indian Weightlifter said that the IWF has robbed her of the chance to qualify for the Tokyo Olympics due to its callous attitude. She demanded an apology and compensation from the world body for causing her mental harassment. She said that it is every athlete’s ultimate dream to win a medal in the Olympic Games or at least participate in it.

She further slammed IWF’s handling of the situation by saying that this is not how IWF is supposed to function. She demanded that IWF must give a genuine explanation and the responsible body or organisation or individual must be penalised.

Background

Sanjita Chanu’s case had been dragging on since November 2017. It had been marred by several anomalies and administrative goof-ups since the beginning

including assigning two different numbers to the same sample. Chanu had won gold medals at the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games and 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in the women's 48 kg and 53 kg weight category respectively.

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